

**SERVICE QUALITY OF FRONT-LINE STAFF  
IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN HOTEL INDUSTRY**

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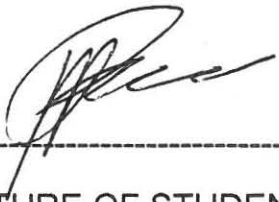
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## DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENT WORK

I, JI-PING PAN, do hereby declare that the research project submitted for the degree MAGISTER TECHNOLOGIAE: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, is my own independent work and has not been submitted before to any institution by me or anyone else as part of any qualification.



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## SUMMARY

The hotel industry is a developing, dynamic, diverse and complex industry. As competition becomes tougher, service quality becomes an increasingly important issue for hoteliers. It is perceived to be the means by which a hotel can gain a competitive edge in the marketplace, differentiate itself from competitors, retain existing customers and attract new ones.

The overall goal of the study is to investigate the factors that influence the quality of service rendered by front-line staff in the Free State and Northern Cape hotels.

The population for this survey includes all graded hotels, motels, guesthouses and guest farms within the central tourist region (Free State and Northern Cape). A sampling frame was selected with the assistance of SATOUR and a detailed address list of fifty-six graded hotels was obtained from SATOUR. A postal survey was completed by means of a questionnaire that was mailed to each one of the fifty-six hotels. The response rate was 51.98%.

The service performance of the front-line staff in the hotel industry is the key factor when assessing their customers' perception of quality. Hotel managers should stress that everyone is part of a team and that the success of the hotel depends on the performance of everyone involved. Effective performances are influenced by work opportunities, motivation and the working environment.

The key to competitive advantage in the hotel industry is largely a superior plan that must fit the particular circumstances of front-line departments and prevent the occurrence of poor service quality. Otherwise the service will



lack direction and the quality of performance will vary considerably both between hotels and also between individual staff members within hotels.

Dimensions of service quality can be quantified by obtaining measures of expectations and perceptions of service standards. Analysing different perspectives of the measurement will be conducive to the improvement of service quality. The control of service quality is a management function to ensure that the hotel's goals and standards are met. Both dimensions and control of service quality can guarantee standardised service performance.

In-service training can be a key instrument in maintaining optimal level of performance in a hotel. Staff cannot be expected to render high-quality service unless they know what is expected of them. Training programs should be designed to enable all the staff members to perform their service well, and fully develop their capability. The training must be interesting, detailed, and frequently reinforced. The training methods should be unique and effective in producing results under different circumstances.

Continuous improvement of service quality is a vital task for both hotel managers and staff. Market competition means that innovation is always required in all of the hotel's activities, and all the components of service operations must be taken into consideration to achieve this improvement.

The vast majority of the respondents indicated that personal service, and not material service, is the most important aspect in the hotel industry. Managers and front-line staff see a positive attitude towards customers as the most important service quality factor.

From the survey it is clear that managers prefer their front-line staff to "tackle difficult situations", while also caring for the basic characteristics, such as

“accuracy”. The managers of the participating hotels see promotion to a higher position and money as the most important methods to motivate their staff. Helping staff to become aware of their goals and letting the staff know where they fit in best are the most important motivation factors, according to the front-line staff.

Cleanliness, value for money and comfort are key elements in measuring service quality in participating hotels. The main techniques to assess service quality are cleanliness check-lists and customer comment forms.

Hotel managers and front-line staff indicated that on-the-job training is the most important training method used in the participating hotels. It is also clear that front-line staff need more formal training courses to improve their knowledge and skills. According to the respondents, improved staff performance and productivity are the most important results of effective training.

Service quality is one of the key issues for survival in the hotel industry, and is a major factor for achieving commercial success. Faced with rapidly increasing competition, the South African hotel industry simply has no choice but to improve quality through a well-designed training program.

## OPSOMMING

Die hotelbedryf is 'n ontwikkelende, dinamiese, diverse en ingewikkelde bedryf. Soos wat mededinging al strawwer word, raak die kwaliteit van diens al belangriker vir bestuurders en eienaars van hotelle. Deur middel van kwaliteit diens kan 'n hotel 'n mededingende voordeel in die mark verkry. Kwaliteit diens kan 'n hotel in staat stel om homself te differensieer van sy mededingers, bestaande kliënte te behou en nuwe kliënte te trek.

Die algemene doel van hierdie studie is om ondersoek in te stel na die faktore wat die kwaliteit van diens beïnvloed wat deur personeel, in die Vrystaatse en Noord Kaapse hotelle, gelewer word.

Die populasie vir hierdie studie bestaan uit alle gegradeerde hotelle, motelle, gastehuisse en gasteplase in die sentrale toerisme streek (Vrystaat en Noord Kaap). 'n Steekproefraamwerk is gekies met die ondersteuning van SATOER en gedetailleerde adreslys van ses en vyftig gegradeerde hotelle is van SATOER verkry. In die studie is daar van 'n posopname gebruik gemaak. 'n Vraelys is aan elkeen van die ses en vyftig hotelle gepos. Die reaksiekoers was 51.98%.

Die diens wat deur personeel in die hotelbedryf gelewer word is 'n sleutel fakfor in die bepaling van die kliënte se persepsie van kwaliteit. Hotelbestuurders moet dit beklemtoon dat al die personeel deel is van 'n span en dat die sukses van 'n hotel afhang van die prestasie van almal wat betrokke is by dienslewering. Effektiewe prestasie (werkverrigting) word beïnvloed deur werksgeleenthede, motivering en die werksomgewing.



Die sleutel tot mededingende voordeel in die hotelbedryf is 'n uitstekende plan. Die plan moet toepaslik wees vir die departemente in die voorste lyn en moet ook die lewering van swak diens voorkom, sonder 'n toepaslike plan sal dienslewering rigtingloos wees en daar sal groot variasies voorkom in die kwaliteit van die prestasies (werkverrigting) tussen hotelle en personeel in 'n spesifieke hotel.

Die aard en omvang van die kwaliteit diens kan gekwantifiseer word deur die verwagting en persepsies van die kliënte te meet ten opsigte van die standaard van diens wat gelewer word. 'n Ontleding van verskillende perspektiewe van die meting sal bevorderlik wees vir die verbetering van die kwaliteit diens wat gelewer word. Die beheer oor die kwaliteit van die diens is 'n bestuursfunksie en daardeur word verseker dat die hotel se doelwitte bereik word en aan die gestelde standarde voldoen word. Gestandaardiseerde prestasie, ten opsigte van diens, kan verkry word deur aandag te gee aan die omvang van en beheer oor die kwaliteit van die diens.

Opleiding in die lewering van kwaliteit diens is nodig om 'n optimale vlak van prestasie (werkverrigting) in die hotel te handhaaf. Personeel sal nie instaat wees om 'n hoë kwaliteit diens te lewer as hulle nie weet wat van hulle verwag word nie. Opleidingsprogramme moet so ontwikkel word dat dit die personeel instaat sal stel om 'n goeie diens te lewer en hulle eie vermoëns te ontwikkel. Die opleiding moet interessant en gedetailleerd wees. Verder is dit belangrik dat opleiding voortdurend opgevolg en herhaal moet word. Unieke en effektiewe opleidingsmetodes moet gebruik word sodat die resultate positief kan wees onder verskillende omstandighede.

Deurlopende verbetering van die kwaliteit diens wat gelewer word is 'n onmisbare taak van hotelbestuurders en personeel. As gevolg van die mededingende mark word innovasie vereis in al die aktiwiteite wat in 'n hotel plaasvind. Om 'n deurlopende verbetering in die kwaliteit van diens te verseker, moet al die komponente van diens in berekening gebring word.

Die meeste respondente het aangedui dat persoonlike diens, en nie materiële diens, die belangrikste aspek in die hotelbedryf is. Bestuurders en personeel beskou 'n positiewe houding teenoor kliënte as die belangrikste diens-kwaliteit faktor.

Uit die ondersoek is dit duidelik dat bestuurders dit verkies dat personeel moeilike situasies moet kan hanteer. Die personeel konsentreer egter meer op die basiese eienskappe soos akkuraatheid. Die bestuurders van die deelnemende hotelle beskou bevordering en geld as die belangrikste metodes om hulle personeel te motiveer. Die personeel is egter van mening dat as hulle hul doelwitte kan bereik en presies weet waar hulle in die hotel inpas hulle meer gemotiveerd sal wees.

Volgens die respondente is sindelikheid, waarde vir geld en gemak die sleutel elemente in die meting van kwaliteit diens. Sindelikheds kontrolelyste en kommentaar vraelyste wat deur kliënte voltooi word, is die belangrikste tegnieke wat gebruik word om die kwaliteit van diens te beoordeel.

Hotelbestuurders en personeel het aangedui dat indiensopleiding die belangrikste opleidings metode is wat in die deelnemende hotelle gebruik word. Dit is ook duidelik dat die personeel 'n behoefte het aan meer formele



opleidingskursusse waardeur hulle hul kennis en vaardighede kan verbeter. Volgens die respondente is verbeterde prestasies deur die personeel en verhoogde produktiwiteit die belangrikste resultate van effektiewe opleiding.

Kwaliteit diens is een van die sleutel elemente vir oorlewing in die hotelbedryf. Verder is dit 'n belangrike faktor vir die bereiking van sukses. As gevolg van toenemende mededinging het die Suid-Afrikaanse hotelbedryf nie 'n ander keuse as om kwaliteit te verbeter deur 'n goed ontwerpte opleidingsprogram.

## CHAPTER 1

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry in South Africa can be seen as one of the fastest-growing industries. The hotel industry is the main pillar in tourism, and will therefore become one of the major contributors to the economy. How the industry addresses the customer's need for a higher standard of service and how it deals with issues such as a limited work force, both in terms of quantity and quality, will be the key to success in this industry (Moth, 1991a: 51).

Unlike the quality of goods, which can be measured objectively by such indicators as durability and number of defects, service quality is an abstract and elusive concept, because of three features unique to services: intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability of production and consumption (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988:23). In this case, service quality is one of the most delicate problems that hotel managers are confronted with. Caras (1995:47) defines two reasons for this:

- It is difficult to know whether the customer is satisfied, as a mere absence of reported complaints is no guarantee that customers are not dissatisfied;
- Customers are becoming more demanding in their perception of quality.

Service quality is a matter of knowing your customers, designing services to meet customers' needs, and finally managing the service production and delivery process to the customers' satisfaction (Brown, 1991:323). As competition becomes tougher, service quality becomes an increasingly important issue for managers and increasingly sophisticated skills are needed in the hotel industry. The real competitive edge in the hotel industry is now

becoming the quality of the services which the staff in the organisation is delivering.

The hotel industry cannot only rely on better economic prospects as a result of increased tourism in South Africa. To meet the needs of the tourist, this industry will have to become more tourist-orientated and more service-minded. Customer service is one of the key issues for survival in the hotel industry. Customer satisfaction can cause hoteliers to experience a number of positive reactions, such as a feeling of competency, self-confidence, success, pride and importance. According to Morgan (1993:4), it is quite clear that if the hotel industry is to survive the challenges and ever-increasing uncertainties with which it is faced, it is going to require front-line staff members who are able to cope with a wide range of new problems and who will be willing to change their behavioural attitudes in order to meet the challenges set before them.

The manager of a hotel may not be able to do anything about the inconvenient location of the hotel, the smallness of its rooms, or the new competitor who opened up nearby. But he/she certainly can and should be able to influence the friendliness of the reception staff and the efficiency of room-service, and could be instrumental in introducing the personal touches which make ordinary customers feel special (Caras, 1995:48-49). Service quality relates partly to the physical standard of the facilities, and partly - and more importantly - to the standard of service. High standards will increase repeat customers, attract new customers and consequently increase incoming customers.

There is a great growth potential for the South African hotel market if service quality can meet the needs of customers. A high standard of service enhances a company's ability to attract new customers and promotes cross-selling opportunities. The hotel staff who have direct contact with customers are all working towards the goal of satisfying customers, since the emphasis of the hotel is on long-term performance.

Service quality encompasses all the elements involved in producing and delivering a product and service, from the initial contact with the customer through the actual sale, to the subsequent serving. The main elements of service are as follows (Deng, 1989: 199-205):

- The quality of service attitude relating, among other aspects, to: initiative, enthusiasm, patience and thoughtfulness.
- The quality of sanitation and hygiene -- including all facilities, equipment as well as food.
- The quality of service facilities -- the well-equipped service items provided by the hotel.
- The quality of service skills and techniques.
- The quality of service efficiency -- measured by the performance and standards.
- The quality of security and safety.
- The quality of food and beverage.

The above-mentioned elements play an important role in the functional departments in a hotel.

## **1.2 PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION**

The key to the success of an organisation is qualified labour. The hotel industry in South Africa is "facing the prospect of a serious shortage of qualified labour" (Herman and Eller, 1991:55). Interviews with some hotel managers



have indicated that service quality is generally inconsistent; the front-line staff in particular often lack skills and experience. In the List of Courses issued by the HITB there is no course that refers to service quality control (Hospitality Industry Training Board, March, 1992). In response to this, a number of service quality training schedules have been listed in the Training Course Directory of the HITB (Hospitality Industry Training Board, March, 1995). There is a trend in the hotel industry that service quality must be the concern of both hotel practitioners and academics, in order to meet the needs of customers.

A problem complicating the South African labour situation is that there is a generation of disadvantaged youths who are functionally illiterate and do not possess the basic skills needed to become productive, self-supporting members of society (Van Rensburg, 1992:10). The hotel industry consists of staff with a great disparity between qualified and unqualified people. It makes service quality control more difficult. A SATOUR (South African Tourism Board) survey (Caras, 1993:59) reveals that 80% of tourists believe that service standards in South Africa are below average. According to Blem (1995:10), there are three reasons why service standards in South Africa are so low:

- The bureaucratic nature of government departments concerned and hotels themselves where service is provided under duress.
- A history of racial intolerance. Service is seen as a form of servitude.
- Ignorance causes the lack of service quality. Staff may be taught job skills, but very little training is given on how to care for customers.

Because of the low service quality, the following attitudes are adopted (Dwyer, 1993:65):

**Apathy:** The “don't-care” attitude, usually exhibited by staff who are only doing the job because they have to work.

**Coldness:** Often seen in employees who are unsure of themselves or who lack knowledge of the job. It's a cover-up for their lack of confidence.

**Condescension:** Staff who feel they are superior to the position they hold or the guests they are dealing with, and who treat guests as if they are stupid.

**Impersonal behaviour:** Standard hotel phrases and procedures used in a mechanical manner without feeling/without being influenced by circumstances.

**Inflexibility:** Sticking to the rule books whatever the outcome for the guest.

**Being unhelpful:** Letting the guests sort out their own problems or find their own way by giving vague or incomplete information. The "it's-not-my-job" attitude.

According to Pereira (1995:23), the quality of service in the hotel industry in South Africa is not equal to First World standards at the moment. It is important to improve the quality of service if the industry wants to deliver a First World service.

### 1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study assesses the performance of the front-line staff in the South African hotel industry, in hotels, motels, guest houses/farms, lodges, inns and other fully serviced accommodation in order to meet the specific objectives of the study:

The overall goal of the study is to investigate the factors that influence the quality of service rendered by front-line staff in the Free State and Northern Cape hotels.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To investigate the formal qualifications of managers and front-line staff in the hotel industry
- To determine the level of service quality in the hotel industry
- To determine the effectiveness of service quality planning in the hotel industry
- To identify service quality measurement and control techniques used in the hotel industry
- To investigate the factors that indicate the need for staff training in the hotel industry
- To identify the main training methods that hotels frequently use
- To determine the importance of continuous improvement of service quality in the hotel industry

## **1.4 METHOD OF STUDY**

### **1.4.1 Literature Study**

The literature study entailed a review of service quality in the South African hotel industry, as well as leading international hotels, in order to identify the importance of service quality in the hotel industry.



### **1.4.2 Empirical Study**

The empirical study was completed in an endeavour to gain an understanding of the present situation regarding service quality in the Free State and Northern Cape hotel industry. There is no doubt that the hotel industry is starting to play an important role in the development of the South African economy, and therefore, the need to research and gain an insight into the present state of service quality in the hotel industry is indispensable.

#### **1.4.2.1 Population**

The population for this study includes all graded hotels, motels, guesthouses and guest farms – which will be referred to as hotels for the purpose of this study – within the central tourist region (Free State and Northern Cape). A detailed address list of all the hotels in this region was obtained from SATOUR.

#### **1.4.2.2 Sampling frame**

A sampling frame was compiled with the assistance of SATOUR. According to the New National Grading and Classification Scheme, fifty-six graded hotels were identified since its launch in October 1993.

The previous grading scheme in South Africa concentrated on the provision of physical facilities in hotels, often failing to account for, to encourage, or to reward the provision of acceptable standards of service and hospitality. SATOUR has joined other international tourism authorities in recognising that the grading of facilities alone should not be the only consideration when rating tourist accommodation and it has extended the national scheme to include a qualitative classification of the service standards offered, in addition to the quantitative facility grading normally associated with accommodation grading



(SATOUR: 1993). The hotels that were included in the sampling frame were the graded hotels as at 30 September 1996.

#### **1.4.2.3 Data collection**

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the direct method of data collection was utilised to obtain primary data. Hence, direct mailed questionnaires were used to collect basic data for the study.

##### **1.4.2.3.1 Advantages of mailed questionnaires**

- A large volume and variety of information can be collected by using mailed questionnaires in much less time than it would take to get around to each respondent.
- Mailed questionnaires may make it easier for some respondents to give socially undesirable answers, because there is no interviewer effect (True, 1989:249).
- Sufficient time is given to allow the respondents the necessary latitude to complete the questionnaires.

##### **1.4.2.3.2 Disadvantages of mailed questionnaires**

- Respondents more easily turn down a mailed request than refuse someone in a face-to-face encounter (Dillman, 1978:62-63).
- A large problem occurring with mail surveys is the low response rates obtained.

In order to overcome the above-mentioned disadvantages of a mailed questionnaire, a number of actions were taken:

- Pre-testing was undertaken in which two hotels administered the draft questionnaire.
- Motivational and explanatory covering letters (see Annexure A and C), supported by Technikon Free State and SATOUR Bloemfontein regional office were forwarded to all participants together with the questionnaires.
- Anonymity in the survey was guaranteed.
- Stamped, addressed reply envelopes were enclosed to facilitate a speedy response to the questionnaires.
- A follow-up request with another copy of the questionnaire and another stamped return envelope was sent to all those who failed to complete and return the questionnaire. Follow-up telephone calls were made in an attempt to encourage potential respondents to return the questionnaires.

On the basis of the above-mentioned, a postal survey was completed, whereby a questionnaire (see Annexure B) was mailed to the managers of each of the fifty-six graded hotels identified from the address list obtained from SATOUR. The managers from twenty-nine graded hotels completed the questionnaires and mailed them back. The response rate was 51.78%.

A separate questionnaire (see Annexure D) was mailed to the front-line staff. The same address list that was used for the first questionnaire was also used for the second questionnaire. A convenience sample was drawn from the fifty-six graded hotels. Thirty questionnaires were mailed to front-line staff. The questionnaires were mailed as follows: eighteen to two-star hotels, ten to three-

second part of the survey because very few one-star hotels represent all the front-line functions.

Fifteen front-line staff members mailed back their questionnaires. The response rate was 50%.

### **1.5 PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED DURING THE STUDY**

- Many of the sources of information regarding the hotel industry or service quality in particular are only available from abroad. No relevant literature referring specifically to service quality in the South African hotel industry was available.
- During the processing of the data from the empirical study, it became clear that a certain number of small hoteliers do not care about service quality. Some hotels and hotel groups were unwilling to supply any information.

### **1.6 DIVISION OF THE STUDY**

Chapter two gives a general overview of the local hotel industry, including external and market factors that impact on hotels and general market trends. A brief introduction of hotel management in South Africa is also given in this chapter.

Chapter three focuses on the front-line staff in different functional departments to provide an understanding of the critical nature of their roles and appreciation of the inherent stresses and conflicts they face.

Chapter four refers to the task of improving service quality associated with staff performance. It was observed that customers evaluate service quality through their perceptions of the performance of service. Effective performances,



namely staff's skills, experience and personnel capability, have been examined together with work opportunity, motivation and the working environment.

Chapter five intended to emphasise those aspects of planning that are most important for improving service. Service quality planning relies on how well the process is deployed throughout the front-line departments in hotels. The service performance standards should be well formulated in order to set and evaluate the staff's performance.

In chapter six, the following three points are highlighted: Firstly, dimensions of service quality can be quantified by obtaining measures of expectations and perceptions of the performance level. Secondly, service quality control is an important management function to ensure that a hotel's goals and standards are met. Thirdly, hotel staff and managers should welcome or even seek customer complaints.

Chapter seven contains a discussion of in-service training. By defining training needs, a hotel should determine what specific knowledge, skills and attitudes must be developed to bring staff's performance up to standard. The various methods which can be used during training are also discussed.

Chapter eight introduces the task of continuous improvement in service quality. Effective improvement elements and approaches are also identified in the chapter.

Chapter nine reflects the results of the empirical survey. The results are analysed and placed in perspective.

Chapter ten comprises a summary of the study in which the conclusions and recommendations regarding the improvement of service quality in front-line staff are discussed.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **MANAGEMENT OF HOTELS**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

There can be no doubt that the hotel industry is a massive and a growing industry, both on a national and an international scale. One need only glance at the hotel industry of today to see the challenges of tomorrow. Customers' high expectations regarding personnel and facilities and the increasingly international character of markets are changing the focus of the task and role of the managers of hotels. Customers are more experienced, more flexible, more independent, more quality conscious and harder to please than ever before. How the industry addresses the customers' higher standards of excellence and how it deals with issues such as a limited work force, both in terms of quantity and quality, will be the key to success in this industry (Moth, 1991a: 51).

Traditionally, the South African hotel industry has obtained much of its managerial resources and methods from overseas but because of the relatively low value of the Rand and the political climate it has become increasingly difficult for South African hotels to recruit overseas managers (Hotelier and Caterer, 1989a: 19). The training and development of well-disciplined managers is therefore of paramount importance for the development of this industry.

#### **2.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN HOTEL INDUSTRY**

During the period of 1906 – 1938, the South African Railways was regarded as the most prominent tourism institution. The Second World War, however, meant that the Tourism Development Corporation that was founded in 1938 was only able to come into its own with the establishment of the Tourist

Corporation in 1947 (Jordaan 1994:2). While the hotel industry had its origins in the Cape as a result of the need for a refreshment station, other factors which had a major influence on the industry's development include the discovery of mineral deposits and legislation with regard to the Liquor Act. The whole inclination of the liquor legislation created the impression that the hotel industry was subordinate to the liquor trade. The consequence was that the issued liquor licences were totally unrelated to the actual demand for hotel accommodation from the perspective of the travelling public. Only in 1963 was a Commission of Enquiry into the South African hotel industry introduced to analyse the industry's strong and weak points and to make recommendations on improvements. The result of the Commission's report was the founding of the Institute of the Hotel Board on 1 September 1965 (Hotel Act No. 70 of 1965). One of the five designated functions of this body was the introduction of a recommended grading system, and early in 1967 the first hotel in South Africa was graded according to this system.

Over the years, the Government made an earnest attempt to promote hotels in South Africa. 1983 can be regarded as a crucial year for the South African hotel industry, since this was the year in which the Department of Commerce and Industry, the South African Tourism Board and the Hotel Board were amalgamated to form the new state-subsidised South African Tourism Board. It is correct to assert that from then on the hotel industry in South Africa formally started to function in a structured manner (The South African Tourism Board Act, 100 of 1983).

## **2.3 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN HOTEL INDUSTRY**

The hotel industry is considered to be one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. Two conflicting phenomena in the South African hotel industry should be noted. On the one hand, guests and business travellers have



become more and more demanding on resorts and conventional hotels. Every stay, every corporate meeting, every event must be better than the last. On the other hand, all hotels face serious resource challenges, probably most significant of which is that the labour pool continues to shrink (Morgan, 1993:1). The major input of a hotel is the customer seeking satisfaction of certain needs. The desired output is a satisfied customer. Mullins (1993:8) pointed out that in order to achieve this output, the transformation of the conversion process will entail the customer being suitably rested / refreshed / entertained or having had a rewarding experience in a comfortable and safe environment.

### **2.3.1 South African Hotel Market Trends**

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), in 1995 (Market trends, 1997; Appendix A: 3) South Africa was ranked 25<sup>th</sup> out of the top 40 tourism destinations (In 1985 it ranked 55<sup>th</sup>). This ranking suggests that tourists are becoming more discerning in their choice of a destination. They are furthermore becoming more unpredictable and spontaneous in terms of their "consumption" patterns. The need for stimulation and new experiences is now the most important travel motivator. Both the domestic and international tourism markets cite South Africa's scenery and wildlife as the most important drawcards. This also coincides with the world trend of greater environmental conscience and growing interest in Eco-tourism.

South Africa's tourism market has grown significantly in terms of arrivals since the political reform process was initiated. This was particularly the case with South Africa's overseas visitor market, which has shown an average growth of 19% since 1990 (Market trends, 1997, Appendix A: 3). It is not surprising that the South African Tourism Board refers to South Africa as "a world in one country".

There was a steady improvement in acceptance of service quality in the South African hotel industry, but the current service standard is still far behind the international level. Hotel managers have to be willing to change their behavioural attitudes to meet the challenge facing their industry.

### **2.3.2 The Status Quo of the South African Hotel Industry**

The hotel industry is one of the most important sectors of the tourism industry as a whole. South Africa currently has 8 495 tourist accommodation establishments with 166 165 rooms/units and 609 825 beds. Of these, camping and caravan sites are in the majority, accounting for 28% of the total, followed by hotels (25%), holiday flats (11%), resorts (11%), guest houses and farms (9%) and game lodges (6%). National and provincial parks account for a mere 2% of visitor accommodation. While these figures seem impressive, it must be cautioned that they are less indicative of the quality and international marketability of establishments available (White Paper 1996:39). Hotels with higher gradings tend to achieve better occupancy percentages than those with lower gradings, and hotels in some areas (Cape Town, for example) achieve a lower annual occupancy figure in comparison with an area such as Johannesburg North. The budget market is growing, but it is satisfying specific needs in the domestic market. Foreign tourists, who enjoy a favourable rate of exchange when visiting South Africa, prefer the upper three, four and five star hotels, which are no longer an affordable option for domestic tourists. In order for this particular segment of the hotel sector to survive, it is necessary to attract many more affluent foreign tourists, more "quality", as opposed to "quantity" tourists (Accent on Tourism, 1993:58-60).



## **2.4 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO HOTEL MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The history of hotel management in South Africa shows that this industry slowly began to lag behind while other industries underwent revolutionary changes and developments. The demand for suitably trained personnel far exceeded the supply. In a sense, hotel management has come of age as a profession and the necessity for the implementation of new management techniques has been acknowledged. The responsibilities of hotel managers have been defined. According to Morgan (1993:36-37), the task of the front-line manager involves the monitoring of the day-to-day running of the hotel. These activities include the meeting of guests, taking care of their needs and monitoring the work and productivity of employees. The administrative manager's responsibilities include systems planning, accounting, budgeting and other control-orientated tasks. The need for sophisticated systems of control was evident and this led to the development of more sophisticated hotel management education.

The demand for hotels as part of the overall tourism experience has increased dramatically. The demand may be fragmented into a whole series of markets constituted by users with differing needs, all dependent on factors such as availability, price, location and facilities (Francis, 1997:1).

### **2.4.1 Size of Hotels**

Usually, hotels over the world are sized according to the number of guest rooms in a property, and are typically grouped in four size categories:

- Under 150 rooms,
- 150 – 299 rooms,

- 300 -- 600 rooms, and
- More than 600 rooms.

The above classifications allow for comparisons between hotels of similar size – particularly as regards operational and statistical results. In South Africa, however, most hotels fit into the first two categories, unlike the USA where convention hotels have up to 2000 guest rooms (Kasavan and Brooks 1988:35).

#### **2.4.2 Target Markets**

The current trend in the South African hotel industry is to identify smaller groups with the larger target markets, and develop products and services to satisfy the needs of these groupings (Francis, 1997:2). Market segmentation in South Africa and worldwide contributed to a substantial growth in the industry.

#### **2.4.3 Service Performance Standards**

See Chapter 5 (5.4).

#### **2.4.4 Classification of Hotels**

- Commercial hotels,
- Airport hotels,
- Suite hotels,
- Residential hotels,
- Resort hotels,
- Casino hotels,
- Bed and breakfast hotels, and

- Conventional hotels.

A hotel, whether it is independent or part of a chain, can be managed as a separate, independent business entity. Ownership and affiliation provides another means of classifying hotels. Hotels are basically structured into independent hotels (private individual owners) and chain hotels (Sun International, Southern Sun, Karos, Protea, Hyatt International, three Cities Group, etc.). Chain hotel ownership can also vary from management contracts, to franchises, to referral groups. Some chain hotels can have a mixture of the abovementioned forms of ownership (Francis, 1997:11). Thus each individual hotel can, in effect, be treated as a unique profit centre. While it takes more than one person to effectively manage a hotel, the executive with overall operational responsibility for this business is its general manager (GM). Eder and Umbreit (1989:333) described the GM as the key implementer of the business strategy for the property and the behavioural role model for the entire management team.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

The history of the South African Hotel Industry is one of a long struggle to rid itself of repressive legislation in times when the country was less developed and most of its hotels were more in the nature of public houses or inns.

The hotel industry is plagued by many problems, all of which will affect the development of South African hotels. There are two conflicting phenomena in this industry:

- Travellers demand all kinds of hotels, guest-houses and resorts;
- Hotels are faced with serious resource challenges.



However, the situation as regards hotels in South Africa is not completely dismal as a number of opportunities – which include the dynamic nature of the industry, the increase in tourism, as well as social and economical upliftment present themselves to the industry.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE ROLE OF FRONT-LINE STAFF IN THE DELIVERING OF SERVICE**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

A role can be defined as the pattern of behaviour typical of or expected of people in a particular position. The effective and productive operation of hotel activities depends on the breakdown of the total activity of service delivery into specialised and discrete tasks assigned to individuals or groups of hotel staff. For some hotel positions, customer contact and interaction is limited, as in the kitchen or housekeeping. For other hotel staff members, it is a major part of the job to interact with customers, such as the front office or the restaurant. According to Jones and Lockwood (1989:117), these high customer contact positions are known as boundary roles and are subject to particular stresses, which in turn will affect the success of the interaction.

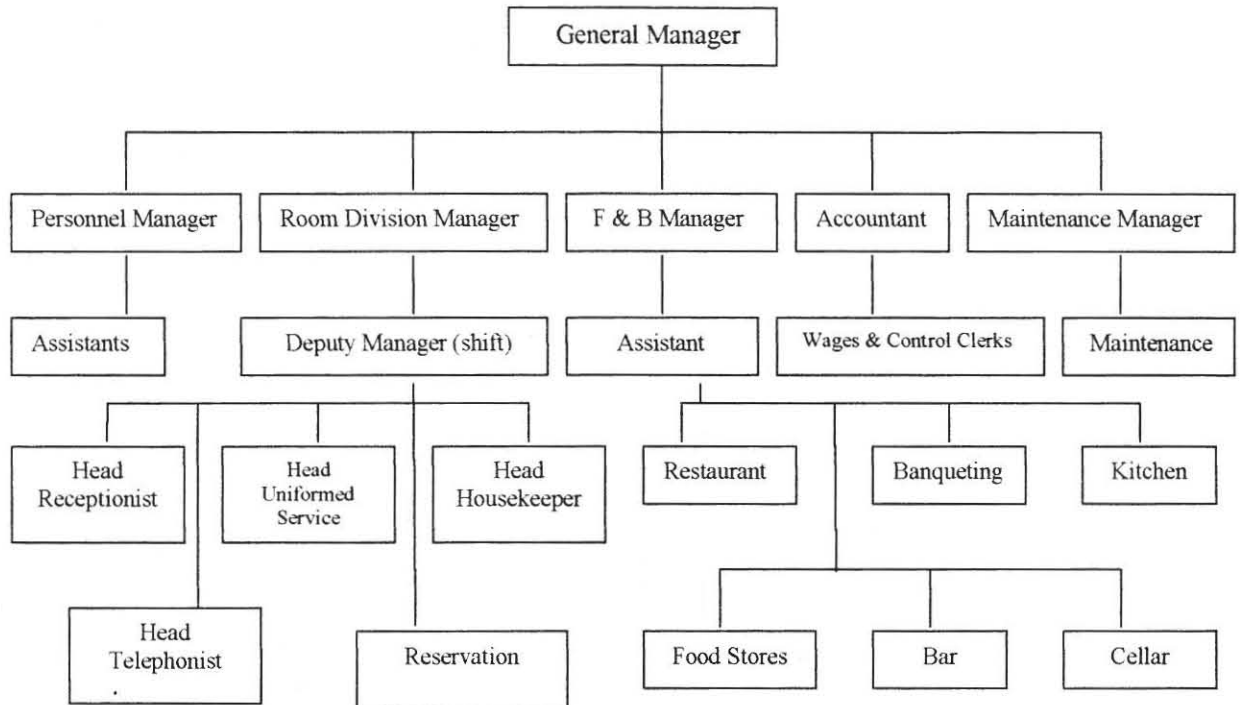
#### **3.2 THE HOTEL STRUCTURE**

Structure is the pattern of relationships among the positions in the hotel and among staff of the hotel. Structure creates a framework of order and command through which the activities of the hotel are planned, organised, directed and controlled.

A large number of accommodations in South Africa are small sized. They are likely to have fewer problems with the structure. The distribution of tasks, the definition of authority and responsibility, and relationships among staff members can be established on a personal and informal basis. But all hotels, of whatever type or size, require some form of structure by which people's interactions and efforts are channelled and co-ordinated. Figure 3.1 depicts an outline of typical key activities and division of work. The hotel is divided along

functional lines into five separate administrative departments: rooms, food and beverage, personnel, accounting and maintenance.

**FIGURE 3.1 MAJOR OPERATING DIVISIONS IN A 500-ROOM HOTEL**



**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM: MULLIUS 1993:53**

The five departments' heads report directly to the GM or deputy GM. Each department is further subdivided into smaller functional units. This subdivision within the five large departments represents additional refinement of the work performed and the knowledge and skills of the staff in each sub-unit.



### **3.3 MAJOR DEPARTMENT FUNCTION**

Hotels are organised along functional lines with departments grouped according to the particular work activity in which they are engaged. As Figure 3.1 shows, the two major operating divisions have been identified as rooms division and food and beverage division. On a company-by-company basis individual functions can be found in various departments, but hotel organisations are set up to deliver these two basic services to the customers, either through the sales of rooms or food and beverage. The function of the following two departments will be briefly discussed.

#### **3.3.1 The Rooms Department**

The rooms department performs the lodging function of a hotel. Reservations must be accepted, guests must be hospitably received and assigned clean rooms, the status of available and occupied rooms must be kept current, guests must receive mail and phone messages promptly, security must be maintained, public spaces such as lobbies must be kept clean, and guest questions must be answered. These are some of the more important functions of the rooms department (Nebel III, 1991:130). To carry out their function, the rooms department is divided into a number of sub-units, each of which performs rather specialized tasks. For example, a front office is where guests are greeted when they arrive at the hotel, where they are registered, and assigned to a room. The housekeeping department is responsible for cleaning guestrooms and public spaces. The engineering department is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the hotel's entire physical plant.

A great deal of interdependence exists within the rooms department, thus calling for close co-ordination of activities between sub-units.

### **3.3.2 The Food and Beverage Department**

The primary function of the food and beverage department is, of course, to provide food and drinks to the hotel's guests. There is great diversity in the kinds of activities performed by a food and beverage department and in the skills required within the department. Thus, within the food and beverage department there are a number of functional sub-units where tasks are further specialized (Rutherford in Nebel III, 1995:39). For example, the food production or kitchen department in a 500-room hotel needs an executive chef who has a variety of culinary specialists responsible for different aspects of food preparation. The actual service of the food in a hotel's restaurants usually belongs to a separate department. In many hotels, full-service or 24 hours a day in-room food and beverage delivery has replaced the traditional room service. There is usually a separate function within the food and beverage department called bar or beverage management. Ideally, that department will co-ordinate all matters that concern spirituous liquors, wines, and beers.

With the increased national attention on the importance of conferences, conventions, and meetings of all kinds, these food service professionals whose speciality is to plan and serve meals and beverages to large groups of people become increasingly important. These affairs represent a significant contribution to the profits of hotel food and beverage service.

### **3.3.3 Other Functional Departments**

Personnel, accounting and maintenance departments can be considered as the departments that serve and support the other departments in the hotel. The success of a hotel is measured by its overall performance, not the performance of one department. Nebel III (1995:41) pointed out that a functional department's strength lies in its ability to focus on its own tasks and activities.

All departments must keep the goals of customer service and profitability in mind rather than focus narrowly on their own concerns.

### **3.4 THE ROLE OF FRONT-LINE DEPARTMENTS**

Front-line staff members provide a link between the external customer and environment and the internal operations of the hotel. They often directly influence customer perceptions of responsiveness through their personal willingness to help and their promptness in serving customers. They are referred to as boundary spanners (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996:307) who serve a critical function in understanding, filtering, and interpreting information and resources to and from the hotel and its external customers. This specialization enables front-line staff in the hotel to become skilled and proficient through training and practice, and thereby improves their operations.

In order to attract and serve customers and make a reasonable profit, hotels are organised into functional areas or departments based on the services the hotel provides. For instance, all hotels have a room department to manage guestrooms, and a food and beverage department to operate the restaurant or bar. Within each department, there are specialised roles. The room department handles reservations, check-in and checkout activities, housekeeping, uniformed and telephone service. Food and beverage department performs dining room and bar services as well as its preparations.

#### **3.4.1 The Role of the Front Office**

The front office department represents the single largest profit centre for the hotel, which is room sales, and it is the hotel's nerve centre, the liaison between the guest and the hotel. During the guest's stay, the front office is the focus of requests for information and services. Check-in and check-out



activities are usually the guest's first and last impressions of the hotel. There are three main roles to be played by the front office department (Lattin, 1995:129-130):

- To sell rooms, which includes registering guests and assigning rooms;
- To keep accounts, determine credit, render bills, receive payments, and provide for proper financial and credit accommodations; and
- To provide services such as handling mail, telegrams, and messages for guests and furnishing information about the hotel, the community, and any special attractions or events.

#### **3.4.2 The Role of Reservation**

The reservation section often has the first contact with the guest. Every hotel has its own method of processing reservations – taking reservations, filing them, placing them in the racks, assigning rooms, and completing folios. Although the procedures may differ, the purpose is still the same – to satisfy guests in order to maintain a good hotel reputation and achieve maximum occupancy.

#### **3.4.3 The Role of Telephone Service**

A telephone operator rarely sees the guest, but his or her voice and telephone manners can influence a guest's opinion of the hotel and its service. This section acts as a communications centre in hotel operations.

#### **3.4.4 The Role of the Uniformed Service**

The staff members in this section include bell-persons, a concierge, and transportation or valet parking staff. Their roles are important, since they are often the first and last hotel staff to interact with guests. Angelo and Vladimir (1994:173) note that bell-persons move guest luggage to and from guestrooms. They also escort guests to their rooms, inspect guestrooms while rooming the guests, and explain the feature of the room and the hotel to guests. The concierge is the main source of information about the hotel and performs many of the roles that a host might perform for guests. Transportation service includes valet parking either in the hotel's own garage or a nearby facility.

#### **3.4.5 The Role of the Food and Beverage Service**

The food and beverage department occupies an important and unique position in the hotel industry. The quality of a hotel's food and beverage powerfully affects a guest's opinion of a particular hotel and influences his or her willingness to return.

According to Lattin (1995:197), a food and beverage operation in a hotel performs an important threefold mission:

- To produce an adequate profit;
- To provide suitable food and beverage service within the hotel; and
- To help and support the role of the hotel in the community.

Hotel dining rooms and bars should provide excellent food and beverage products with excellent service and environment. A good food and beverage

operation does more than help establish the quality of the hotel in the eyes of the travelling public. Such an operation may become a very valuable profit maker, may give the hotel a distinct competitive advantage over another operation, may help to justify an increase in the average room rates, and may help to keep occupancy levels high.

### **3.5 THE INTERACTION BETWEEN FRONT-LINE AND BACK-STAGE STAFF**

Usually service groups result from a deliberate hotel decision to place staff together to meet operational needs. This is traditionally based on the functional nature of the task to be performed by the group.

The hotel industry is largely divided into two sorts of groups – front-line staff who come into direct contact with the customer, for example, reception, and back-stage staff who are mainly responsible for the production side of the operation, for example housekeeping. It is often in the interaction between these teams that conflict arises, and this diverts effort away from working together to achieve hotel aims (Jones and Lockwood, 1989:12).

Front-line staff members and those supporting them from behind the scenes are critical to the success of any hotel organisation. Interdependence between front-line and “back-stage” can cause conflict for two reasons:

First, there is a desire for independence, but a need for interdependence, a sense for having to rely on someone else – the kitchen has to rely on the restaurant to present its food properly, reception has to rely on housekeeping to get the rooms back on time.

Secondly, it is possible to identify different goals between the front-line and “back-stage” that place different demands upon the same situation.



Staff members in direct customer contact adapt their attitudes and working patterns to cope with their positions and this may result in what a non-contact group would see as inappropriate behaviour. It should be apparent that anything that happens to alter one aspect of the equation will automatically affect the others. It is necessary to be aware of this interdependence between front-line and “back-stage” to be able to cooperate as one unit.

### **3.6 THE INTERACTION BETWEEN FRONT-LINE STAFF AND CUSTOMERS**

Service quality can be developed and maintained in hotels as a key strategy for business success. The development of service quality must be founded on building quality into the operation. This must be based on a clear understanding of the needs and expectations that customers bring to hotel operations.

Services are produced and delivered in interaction between the customer and the service provider. Gummesson (1991:7-16) identifies four different interactions that can occur when a customer enters a service operation:

- Between the customer and the service provider's employees;
- Between the customers themselves;
- Between the customer and the physical products and physical environment;
- Between the customer and the service delivery system.

Service delivery does not only consist of customer interactions but also involves the interactions and other work going on inside the hotel to produce the service. The front-line departments in a hotel can be seen to consist of the following participants:

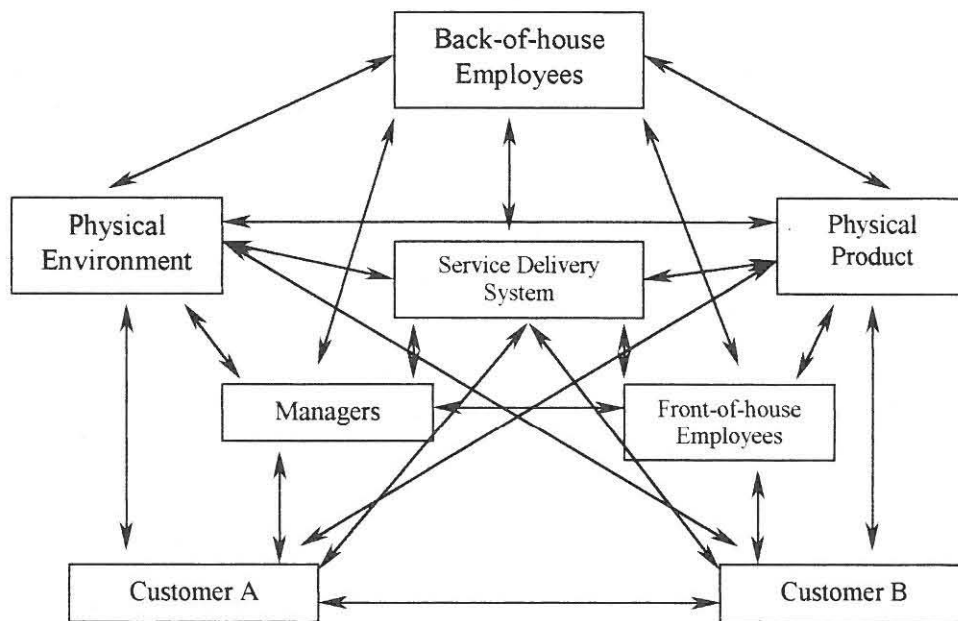
- Customers;



- Support staff (back-stage personnel);
- Management.

With these interactions and participants identified, a full picture of the interactions (Figure 3.2) within the service delivery system can be drawn.

**FIGURE 3.2 THE COMPLEXITY OF SERVICE INTERACTION**



**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM: LOCKWOOD ET AL.1992:314**

### 3.7 CONCLUSION

Front-line staff affect service quality perceptions to a large degree through their influence of service. It is essential to match what the customer wants and needs with service employees' abilities to deliver. This chapter focuses on front-line staff in different functional departments to provide an understanding of the critical nature of their roles and appreciation of the inherent stresses and conflicts they face.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **SERVICE QUALITY PERFORMANCE OF FRONT-LINE STAFF**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The performance of individual staff forms a fundamental part in fulfilling the hotelier's expectations. It is assumed that achieving the best from an individual will improve the operation's performance. Poor performance will have a direct influence on the overall performance of the unit as measured both by management in financial terms and by customers in terms of service.

Effective performance will have beneficial results for both the staff and the hotel. These results should be achieved through motivation, job design, staff skills and abilities, the right environment and proper labour scheduling (Jones and Lockwood, 1989:49).

Although it is now well accepted that service quality is important for corporate strategy and planning, there are no clear-cut definitions of quality. Many of the suggested definitions focus on meeting or exceeding customer expectations. In this context, customer expectations may be defined as the "desires or wants of consumers, like what they feel a service provider should offer rather than would offer" (Parasuraman, et. al. 1988:17). In other words, service quality is measured in terms of the extent to which performance (as perceived by the customer) meets or exceeds agreed levels of service.

#### **4.2 SERVICE QUALITY AND FRONT-LINE STAFF IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY**

Crosby (1986:17-18) defines quality as conformance to specification. Lewis and Booms (1983:99-104) believe that service quality is a measure of how well



the service level delivered matches customers' expectations. Creedon (1988:26) says his own corporate objective is "to meet or exceed our customers' expectations". In addition, a number of definitions refer to comparisons made by consumers of their expectations of the service with their perceptions of the actual service performance (Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman, 1985:44-52). Service quality should be defined as the sum of the demands placed on a service in order that it may meet the expectations and aspirations of society in general, of specific groups, and of individuals. In certain contexts, the concept may be given a more objective or intersubjective input, and in others, it will have a more individual/subjective tenor. At the same time, a dialectic relationship will always exist between objective and subjective dimensions (Edvardsson and Gustavsson, 1991:329). The service quality of the hotel industry is distinguished from other service enterprises by its ability to supply overnight accommodation and to provide its guests with a full line of products (rooms, food, beverage) and services (reservation, housekeeping, security). These products and services tend to have no lasting physical value, especially the quality of service, which is a major factor in achieving this physical value.

Service quality is the personal relationship between a customer and the particular staff that the customer happens to be dealing with. It encompasses all the aspects involved in delivering a product or service, from the initial contact through the actual sale to the subsequent servicing. According to Walker (1990:6), the concept of service quality can be presented in the form of a model (Fig. 4.1) which should be divided into two service elements:

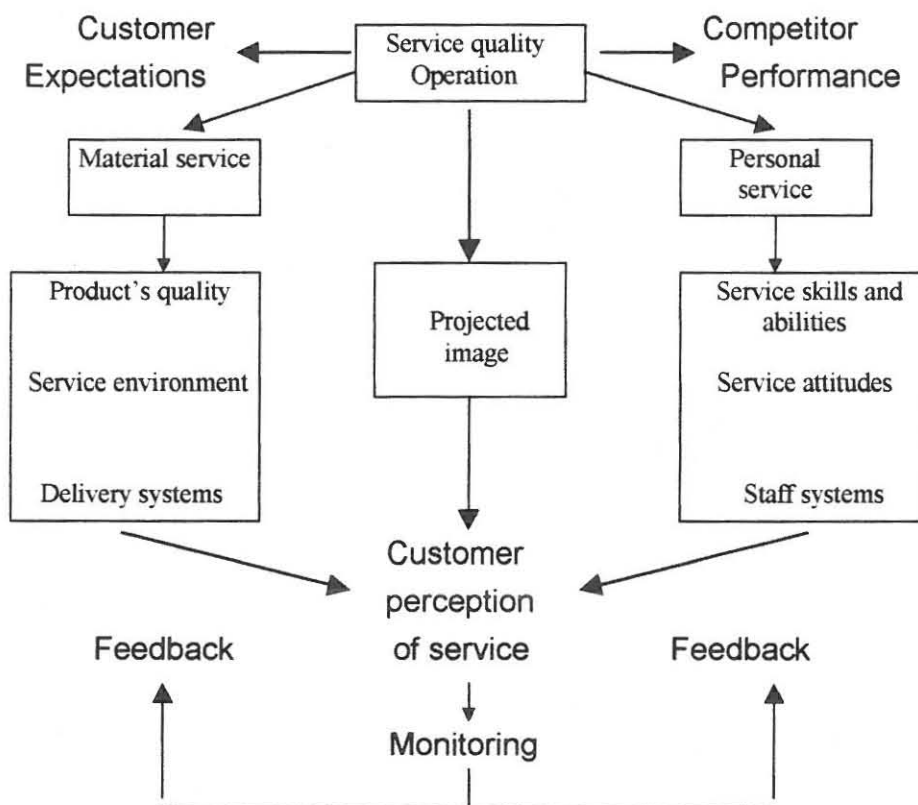
- Material service: relating to tangible aspects, such as product quality, service environment and delivery system;
- Personal service: involving the human interface between consumers and front-line staff. It encompasses skills and abilities, service attitudes,



accuracy and ultimately staff systems. The feature of this element is intangible, subjective and thus more difficult to assess.

Both facets of service quality are important, but personal service is critical and it often overrides material services. Even when a product itself does not meet expectations, excellent personal service can redeem the situation. The image and reputation of a hotel are often created or undermined by the performance of the front-line service providers. As such, it becomes a powerful weapon in the competition field.

**FIGURE 4.1**  
**A MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY OPERATIONS**



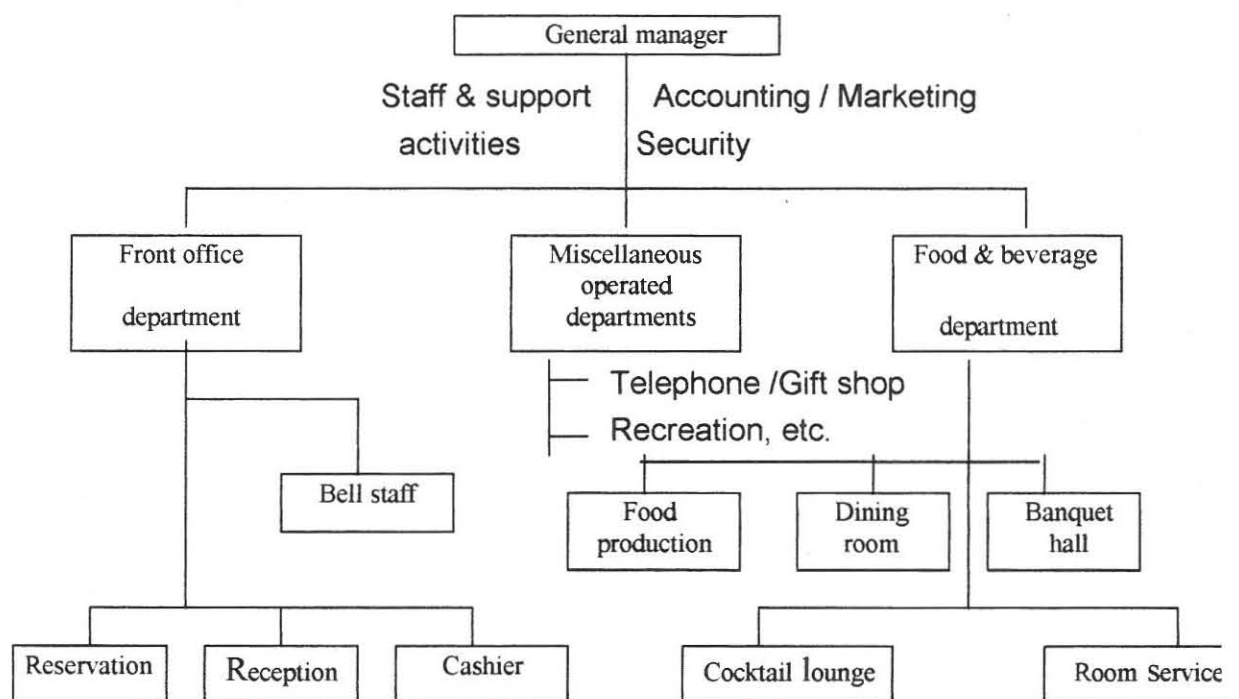
**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM WALKER (1990:8)**

Hotel front-line positions are those areas and departments with which the guest is most likely to come into direct contact during a normal period of occupancy. Figure 4.2 gives an outline of the major front-line functional departments, namely, the front office (reservation, reception, cashier, lobby and bellman), food and beverage department (food production, dining room and banquet) and some miscellaneous operating departments (telephone, gift shop and recreational areas). The following list include the main components of service quality:

- The service attitude: politeness, friendliness, consideration, tact and respect of contact personnel;
- Reliability and dependability, no errors or delays;
- The possession of the required knowledge and skill to perform the service;
- Security and safety: freedom from danger, risk or doubt;
- Tangible facilities: physical evidence of the service, appearance of personnel, tools or equipment used to provide the service;
- Communication: informing customers and listening to them;
- Understanding the customer: making an effort to understand the customer's individual needs.
- Credibility: having the customer's best interests at heart will contribute to the credibility of the hotel's reputation and personal characteristics (Powers, 1992:254)

The above-mentioned aspects play an important role in the front-line functional departments in a hotel. Therefore, the performance of staff in the departments is the key factor in operating all guest services and co-ordinating front-and back-of-the-house activities in such a manner as to achieve maximum guest satisfaction.

**FIGURE 4.2**  
**MAJOR FRONT-LINE FUNCTIONAL DEPARTMENTS**



**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM POWERS (1992: 253)**

#### **4.3 CUSTOMER'S PERCEPTION OF SERVICE QUALITY PERFORMANCE**

As customers become more sophisticated in their expectations or demands, the service providers need to have more comprehensive and effective ways to



satisfy customer needs. In the hotel industry, customers assess service quality by comparing what they want or expect to what they actually get or perceive they are getting. It obviously means that the staff have to use the knowledge of their customers' preferences to shape services to meet specific customer needs.

#### **4.3.1 The General Perception of Customers in the Hotel Industry**

Parasuraman, et. al. (1988:23) indicated that five dimensions of service quality are important to the customers regarding the service they desire:

- Tangibles: Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel;
- Reliability: The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately;
- Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service;
- Assurance: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence; and
- Empathy: Caring, individualised attention the firm provides its customers.

In the hotel industry, the major problem facing the front-line operator is identifying what it is that the customer wants from a hotel. The characteristics of quality perceived by customers in a graded hotel are prioritised as six "C"s (The Hotel Operating Handbook, 1986:8):

- Comfortable: Pleasant, clean, hygienic, safe and relaxing;

- Correct: Performing the promised service accurately and effectively;
- Competence: Applying knowledge to the job performance and using job performance related skills;
- Courtesy: Being polite, considerate, sympathetic, honest, trustworthy and sincere;
- Convenience: Provision of reasonable facilities and appearance of personnel for customers to deal with easily;
- Communication: The ability to listen, keeping the customer informed.

The six "C"s perception of service quality includes both tangible and intangible aspects of the experience. The bundle of products and services offered at a hotel restaurant can be used as an example:

Firstly, purchasing physical items -- actual food, drinks and other items offered by the restaurant, such as matches and tissues;

Secondly, purchasing a number of characteristics that can be determined by one or more of the five senses: the taste and aroma provided by the chef, the service of the waiters, and the atmosphere created by the structure, furnishings, and fellow diners;

Thirdly, purchasing a set of psychological benefits that cannot be clearly defined by any of the senses, such as status (one can afford to eat at this restaurant), comfort, and a sense of well-being (Cowell, 1985:105).

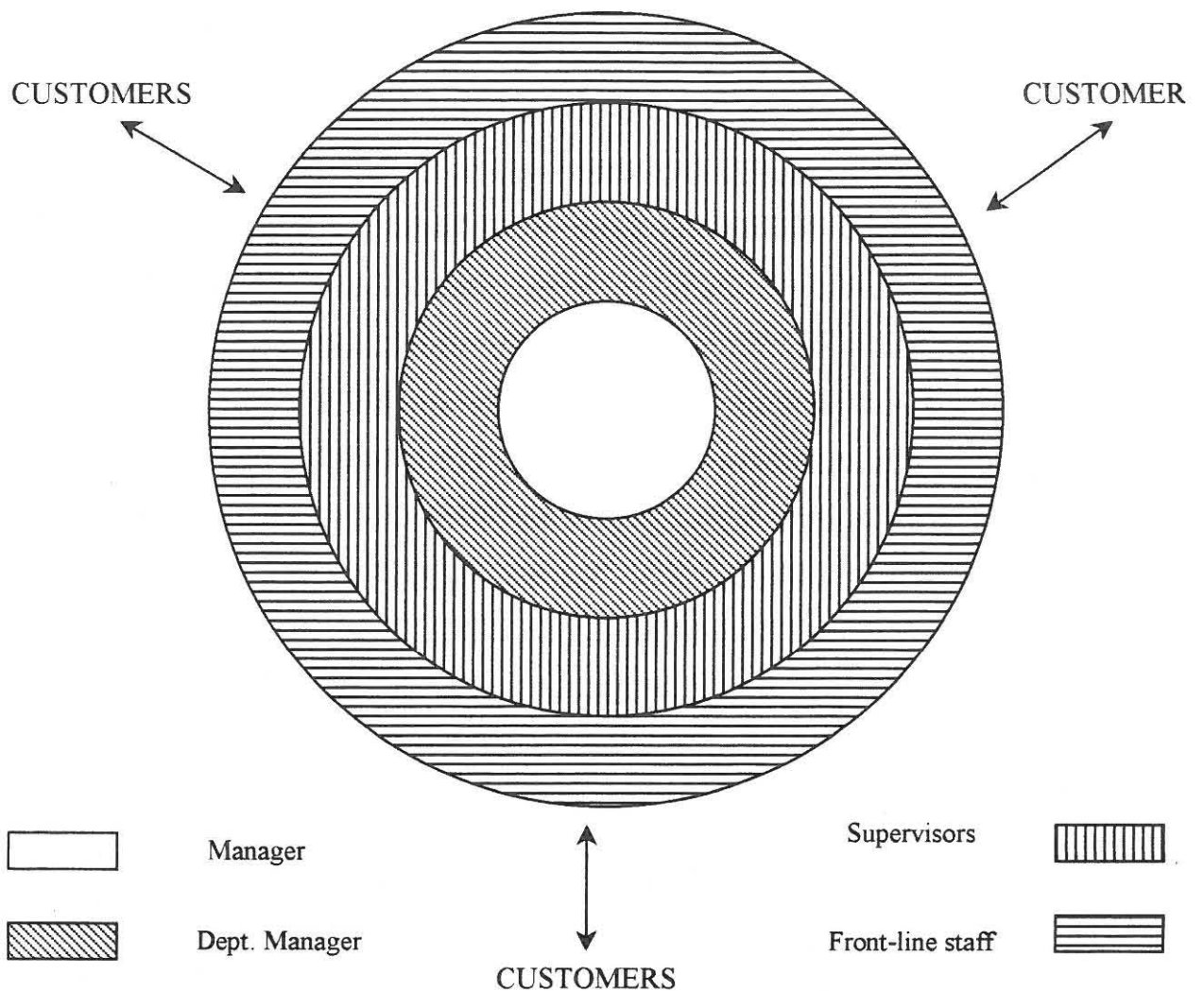
#### **4.3.2 Staff Performance Linked to Customer Perception**

Since service quality relates to customer's needs and expectations, its customers mostly establish the standards adopted by the industry, and these standards have been changing. "Customer perception of service quality results from comparing expectations prior to receiving the service and actual experiences with the service. If expectations are met, service quality is perceived to be satisfactory; if unmet, less than satisfactory; if exceeded, more than satisfactory" (Berry, et al 1985:44-52). The service quality competition in the hotel industry raises customer expectations to a certain level. If service quality meets customer's expectations, the market position is strengthened. The hotel industry must meet or exceed customer expectations in order to earn a reputation and competitive edge for quality. The front-line staff represent the hotel's first contact with customers. They must be well informed and provide the kind of service that wins customer approval. Their behaviour may be as important in influencing the perceived quality of a service as the behaviour of formal sales staff. The hotelier must recognise that every front-line staff member is a salesman of the hotel's service.

The front-line staff will always link closely with customers. Staff performance and customer perceptions always interact in the hotel front-line position (Fig. 4.3). The higher the expectations of the customer, the higher the standard of the staff should be. There are two reasons of this interaction: "firstly, there are constantly rising customer expectations coupled with the demand for better service and, secondly, the art of quality improvement which requires mechanisms for continually upgrading quality has not been mastered" (Daniel, 1989:38). The quality of service provided in hotels is dependent on the performance of the front-line staff.



**FIGURE 4.3**  
**INTERACTION BETWEEN CUSTOMERS AND FRONT-LINE STAFF**



#### **4.3.3 Service Attitudes towards Customers in the South African Hotel Industry**

Service quality occurs when the service is in the process of delivery, usually in an interaction between customer and contact staff of the hotel. The deliverer of the service cannot be separated from the service itself. Therefore, staff

performance will affect customer perception. It can be positive or negative, depending on whether the management in the hotel is aware of it or not.

The South African hotel industry is "facing the prospect of serious shortages of qualified labour" (Herman and Eller, 1991:55) which consists of too few skills at the top and too many unskilled people at the bottom. "In the past, many complaints were received about the quality of service in the South African tourism industry. Too much attention was paid to physical standards, while the quality of service was neglected" (Van Hoven, 1993:57).

Dwyer (1993:66) has identified the following common barriers to the staff's performance in the South African hotel industry:

- Fear of rejection.
- Possible embarrassment.
- Lack of confidence.
- Uncertain of guest perception.
- Uncertain of guest reaction.
- Annoyance with customers generally.
- Irritation with themselves.
- Irritation with the job.
- Pressure of work.
- Poor language and communication skills.
- Lack of experience.

In the South African hotel industry, "the problem is that first-line managers are not always skilled to handle the peculiar problems facing them in a changing South Africa. Supervisors need to acquire, develop and reinforce their technical, administrative and manpower skills" (Owens and Van der Merwe, 1993:56). Front-line staff need to improve their skills, attitudes and behaviours in order to meet customer satisfaction. SATOUR (South African Tourism Board) and the HITB have already made great efforts in enhancing staff skills

at different levels. A vital task of improving the service quality for staff performance at all levels will certainly be implemented by the hotel itself. Service attitudes cannot be easily or quickly changed, but considerable efforts must be made to create the right approach.

#### **4.4 IMPROVEMENT OF THE SERVICE PERFORMANCE OF FRONT-LINE STAFF**

In a sophisticated world, selling the basic necessities of life is not enough. Customers usually need the benefits from a product or a service. Some car manufacturers have not just sold cars, but safety. Manufacturers of cosmetics do not just sell cosmetics, but the chance to feel good, lift your spirits, feel younger and be more successful in your social life. Similarly, hotels should not just provide a superb bedroom and excellent food. Providing a room and food is too product-orientated. Hoteliers must be more customer- than product-orientated by providing "a good night's sleep" rather than a room, "a meal experience" rather than food. Greene (1987:115) has analysed the following elements of psychological benefits, which the customer expects:

- A good night's sleep
- Relaxation
- Escape from pressure
- A feeling of contentment
- Impressing your friends
- Impressing your customers
- Putting your customer in a more receptive mood
- Atmosphere and ambience
- Feeling better when you return to work.

Customers have high expectations of the staff's ability to perform their duties accurately and to be helpful and prompt, followed closely by the ability of staff



to be knowledgeable and courteous. Normal routine performance cannot meet particular challenges in the present hotel industry. Only those who have firm knowledge, abilities and responsibilities can offer excellent services to the customers. Therefore, improving staff's performance in front-line positions is a vitally important task in hotels.

Successful staff performance must be a mutually beneficial relationship. It requires a certain organisational climate (Fig.4.4) which includes the staff's skills/abilities, opportunity for development, motivation and environment (Jones and Lockwood, 1989:51).

**FIGURE 4.4**  
**ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE**



**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM JONES AND LOCKWOOD (1989:51)**

#### **4.4.1 Skills/Abilities of Front-line Staff**

The image and reputation of the hotel are often created or undermined by the performance of front-line staff. If the staff have no confidence in the skills/abilities displayed by the individual dealing with customers, the staff will lose confidence in the hotel.

Skills/abilities consist of several distinct, yet interrelated, components:

- Knowledge (education, training, book learning).
- Experience (practise, instruction).
- Personnel capability (desire to learn, progressive advancement, flexibility, interpersonal skills) (Stewart, 1986:155-160).

##### **4.4.1.1 Knowledge**

In the modern hotel industry, it is generally accepted that the phrase "labour market" should be changed to "skills market", and that the staff of tomorrow will require a different and more sophisticated knowledge and skills portfolio than their earlier counterparts. Knowledge can mainly be obtained through academic education, on and off the job training, book learning and science courses. According to Rosander (1985:232), knowledge of the following aspects is important:

- Technical knowledge;
- Tangible product knowledge;
- Knowledge about business and the hotel;

- Knowledge of operational support personnel;
- Customer handling skills, such as service selling, problem solving, clarifying, summarising;
- Dealing with complaints and aggression;
- Viewing and analysing the capability of the hotel.

Persons who are hired should always be interviewed; their education and knowledge should be examined relative to their potential for promotion. Personal knowledge possessed by staff is a highly detailed description of the type of person who would perform a particular job successfully. If the situation arises where the person's knowledge does not permit him/her to perform the service at the required level, the personnel situation may become rigid, restrict promotions, create morale problems, and lead to unhealthy working conditions and poor performance (Rosander, 1985:232). The fact is that knowledge is the basic requirement needed to improve service quality in the hotel industry.

#### **4.4.1.2 Experience**

Knowledge can improve one's ability, but it is not everything. In some cases, it takes years of experience before an individual reaches a truly high performance level. High employee turnover gives rise to a lack of experience among hotel staff. It may take months or even years before the new employee is performing at the level of the person being replaced. Some unfortunate hotels have such high turnover rates that they may never have realised that high levels of performance can be the result of extended experience. Hotels rotate staff through positions so quickly that they never really get a chance to



reach a high performance level. The staff will never perform well unless they have had a chance to get more experience (Stewart, 1986:157).

Hotel operating rules, performance guidelines and regulations are generally formed by professional experiences. Experience can promote social development. Service quality in the hotel industry can only be improved by having staff with a high level of experience. The Sheraton Hotel in New York City made the following "courtesy pledges" gained from practical experience in their staff performance (Martin and Lundberg, 1991:27):

- Smile with the face.
- Acknowledge each guest in a group by direct eye contact with each one.
- Be specific in giving information or directions.
- Be amiable even when you know the guest is wrong.
- Call guests by their names.
- Highlight the benefits of particular guest services, such as, room movies, fine restaurants, and so on.

Professional experience in hotels can only be obtained through its operating practice, from lower to higher levels, from the back of the house to the front of the house. Once the staff effectively master service performance, they will certainly get the experience necessary to meet the demands of customers adequately and acceptably.

#### 4.4.1.3 Personnel capability

The success of hotel programmes depends upon the staff. They are the ones who have to implement policies, plans, programmes and projects. They can be the difference between success and failure and between an acceptable, quality job and an inferior type of performance. They can thwart even the best-laid policies and plans of executives and managers. Rosander (1985:232) identifies the qualities that reflect a well-equipped personnel capability:

- Ability to learn, be accurate, and be alert.
- Ability to follow instructions.
- Desire to learn.
- Desire to tackle difficult situations.
- Acceptance of challenges.
- Progressive advancement in jobs held.
- Flexibility: ability to adjust to new situations, new conditions, new problems and new assignments.
- Emotional stability: coolness under pressure and the ability to handle stress.

It is possible to have staff with knowledge and skills but who do not have the desire or the willingness to deliver good customer service. Many poor service phenomena result in rude attitudes towards the customer. Poor personnel capability can be very damaging in direct meetings with the customer. Personnel capability is not easy to define, but the behaviour, which results from a certain capability, is often very easy to observe as is its impact on customers

(Walker, 1990:37). For example, staff who lose their temper at the slightest provocation can cause more public relations havoc in a customer-contact situation than they are worth. If the staff seems to have the necessary knowledge and experience, the problem may be inadequate personnel capability.

The component skills/abilities (knowledge, experience and personnel capability) has indicated that knowledge is the foundation, experience is the standard to be measured, and personnel capability is an assurance to improve the service performance. Staff should recognise the important significance of skills/abilities in performing service quality. Any ignorance of skills/abilities will detrimentally affect the service quality of the hotel.

#### **4.4.2 Opportunities for Staff Performance**

Staff who have the requisite skills and abilities to do a well-defined job that contribute to the hotel's objectives, and those who operate in a supportive climate which encourages performance, will be willing to expend effort in carrying out their duties (Jones and Lockwood, 1989:59). The opportunity for staff to demonstrate their skills and abilities is largely under the control of the managers or supervisors. An acceptable approach towards the staff should be that managers and supervisors try everything possible to create the opportunity for a supportive climate. The use of new opportunities for staff to test their skills and abilities provides the necessary challenge, variety and sense of accomplishment to keep staff motivated to perform (Stewart, 1986:158). Some staff, occasionally, are not assertive enough either to make their wants for more opportunities known or to get their needs met for a greater variety of work. The managers or supervisors have to be especially aware of these needs in the case of shy or reserved staff.



If hotels want to improve the service performance of front-line staff, they first need to provide them with opportunities, which include the following:

- The opportunity to learn and to be trained for improving their skills and abilities;
- The opportunity to know the hotelier's expectations;
- The opportunity to be guided and coached in doing the work;
- The opportunity to communicate with management and exchange their views; and
- The opportunity to be promoted to higher positions.

The positions of the front-line staff vary, but they have equal opportunities to perform their work. It is important in this context to realise that no two staff members will respond in the same way to the same opportunity. A really professional manager will be the one who is primarily guided by a real, deep, driving desire to help staff to do their best and get staff to do more for their hotel than they would do for other hotels (Jones and Lockwood, 1989:59-60). Staff always need certain opportunities offered by the manager to develop their abilities, in order to realise the hotel's objectives.

A successful manager in a hotel should attribute a large part of his success to the opportunities he has created for his staff. Once the manager provides an opportunity for advancement that is an added incentive to perform, there should be a substantial improvement of service in the future.

Offering appropriate opportunities to the staff on different occasions can improve and develop the service quality of performance. In fact, opportunities can enhance the staff's performance, which can be assessed by both peers

and customers in order to confirm whether they agree with the demands and expectations, or not. Those who are successful in using opportunities will be winners in a competitive market.

#### **4.4.3 Motivation and Hotel Performance**

Motivation refers to the reasons why people act or behave in certain ways. To motivate people is to point them in a certain direction and take whatever steps are required to ensure that they get there. To be motivated means either to be pointed in a direction of one's own volition, or to be encouraged by whatever means available to get going purposefully and to achieve success on arrival (Armstrong, 1988:63). The responsibility for motivation is threefold -- the individual staff member is responsible for motivating himself, for growing and for being committed; the manager is responsible for fostering growth and recognising the staff's individual styles and potential; and the hotel is responsible for systems and policies that would motivate and demonstrate commitment to the staff's growth and well-being. The responsibilities of motivation from the above-mentioned three aspects should be seen as equitable (Easton-Leadley, 1993:16-17).

However, it is not easy to create a motivating environment. A great deal of effort is spent in finding ways to motivate staff without fully understanding the reasons for a lack of motivation. According to Easton-Leadley (1993:16), there are six reasons for the lack of motivation in some South African organisations:

- The high levels of control of people, resources and procedures;
- High levels of fear, mistrust and cynicism;
- Lack of education and training;

- The feeling of alienation and poor morale;
- Low self-esteem; and
- Changing worker needs and aspirations.

Both staff and managers must realise that if there is to be enhanced motivation in the hotel industry, it should be based on mutual support and mutual understanding. The staff need the skills and abilities to carry out the task to the standard required and to be scheduled to cope with peaks and troughs of demand. The manager should offer a job, which is correctly designed to be efficient and provide support to the individual and avoid conflict. Hotel performance, then, is the right person applying his effort to the right job in the right motivating atmosphere. Every effort is made to achieve harmony between the wants and needs of the hotel manager and the wants and needs of its staff. The motivational effect of a series of small successes is greater encouragement than a series of small criticisms. The hotel's orientation should facilitate staff's individual and joint contributions to their own well being. According to Easton-Leadley (1993:15), this implies a movement away from controlling staff's performance to a real commitment to personal and hotel development.

#### **4.4.4 Support Systems and Performance**

Management support systems are a vitally important factor in generating good performance of front-line staff. They take the form of preparing staff and customers for new service developments, as well as the critical area of equipment and supplies. Many front-line staff members have a genuine desire to give good performance, but feel frustrated by "the system" setting up obstacles in delivering the standard of service they feel they should be giving (Jones and Lockwood, 1989:58). This can range from the waitress who does



not have time to talk to customers, as she would like, because the restaurant is constantly short of staff due to a management directive to cut costs.

One of the most important aspects in hotel support systems is encouraging staff to achieve an expected performance. This encouragement includes:

- Presenting explicit goals that are definite, challenging and achievable;
- Setting up a system for feedback and positive reinforcement;
- Emphasising individual responsibility and accountability;
- Linking rewards to the results of the staff's performance (Jones and Lockwood, 1989:58).

Cardoso (1992:46-47), the owner and MD of the Cumberland Hotel in Worcester, South Africa, is one hotelier who has done everything to assist staff to develop their performance. Cardoso believes that if the owner does not care for the staff, he cannot expect staff to care for the customers. This is the formula to obtain success. The management of a hotel, from the supervisors upward, has a real responsibility to take all the necessary steps to support those below them. According to Johnson (1986:145), Armstrong (1988:77-78) and Easton-Leadley (1993:18), some of the methods of support to the staff are:

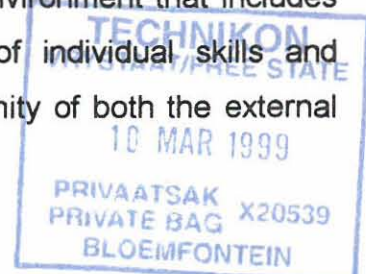
- Use money as a reward and an incentive to suit individual needs as far as possible;
- Let every staff member know where he fits into the hotel and help them to become aware of their own goals so that they become self-motivated;
- Reward and recognise the staff's achievement in terms of keeping them informed on how well they are performing;

- Give staff regular feedback on a formal and informal basis;
- Have subordinates participate in decision-making in order to carry out those decisions enthusiastically and efficiently;
- Build up teamwork to achieve positive cohesion and overcome the negative influences that groups can exert;
- Train and develop the staff by giving them the opportunity to enhance their skills and to achieve positions of greater responsibility; and
- Eliminate the negative things that obstruct their performance.

All support systems that have been described can and should be used in hotel performance. Although increases in pay and other financial rewards are important to the staff, money is not the only answer to solve problems. Participation, special recognition and other forms of non-financial incentives can be effective. It is important for managers to realise that the methods of support which bear directly on performance also affect the individual staff member's motivational state and may thus have a double impact on performance (Carr, 1980:62).

#### **4.4.5 Hotel Environment for the Performance of Front-line Staff**

There are two main perspectives with regard to the hotel environment: The first one is the external environment that includes a social environment created by the government or community, and a physical environment provided by the hotel management. The second one is the internal environment that includes the team/group environment and the environment of individual skills and abilities. Performing the service in conditions of amenity of both the external



and internal environment, the staff can have a major effect on the level of their performance. If a hotelier regards the former (externality) as the appearance, then the latter (internality) should be the essence. In a well-equipped hotel environment, staff don't just rely on managers to map out the performance. They must be self-starters, highly motivated to achieve the hotel's goals, and capable of solving operational and interpersonal problems. Hotel managers must accept responsibility for the teams/groups and the individuals under their control and take positive steps to provide conditions for improving the staff's performance (Zenger, Musselwhite, Hurson and Perrin, 1991:49).

Hotel managers should create or provide a conducive environment for their staff. Generally this means a reasonable salary; a safe place to work; and pleasant surroundings. However, there are three factors that should be considered:

- Firstly, it is difficult to perform if staff don't have the physical resources -- the equipment, all the parts, enough supplies, the ancillary services. An unpleasant physical environment can have very debilitating effects on staff performance.
- Secondly, high performance usually requires support from managers, co-workers, family and social contacts. Nearly every staff member needs consolation in defeat and congratulations in victory.
- Thirdly, corporate culture, the invisible working environment of beliefs, values, attitudes, stereotypes and behavioural norms, have a profound effect on the psychological environment in which each staff member performs (Stewart, 1986:158).

A poor working environment will lead to absenteeism, high job turnover, and lack of punctuality, accident-producing behaviour and sabotage (Stewart, 1986:158). Managers should be concerned with the hotel environment and be



sufficiently supportive, because it will affect staff performance. Performance is the target, and environment can be one of the means of getting there.

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

As competition becomes tougher, service quality becomes an increasingly important issue for hoteliers. The skills and abilities of the front-line staff in the hotel industry are becoming increasingly sophisticated. A hotel wishing to improve service quality must first assess their customers' perceptions of existing quality. If a hotel wants its staff to give their customers high quality treatment, then the hotel has to give its staff high quality treatment. The core issue for a hotel is to communicate that everyone is part of a team and the success of the hotel depends on the performance of everyone involved.

This chapter has considered the task of improving service quality associated with staff performance. It was observed that customers evaluate service quality through their perceptions of the performance of the service. Poor service often leads to discontentment, resulting in customers adopting negative and hostile attitudes to front-line service providers. The emphasis of this chapter, therefore, is on the process of the performance of a hotel's front-line positions. Effective performance, namely staff's skills, experience and personnel capability has been examined together with work opportunity, motivation and the working environment.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SERVICE QUALITY PLANNING**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

It was pointed out in chapter 4 that service quality performance is a basic requirement in fulfilling the hotel's objectives. Effective service quality performance will directly benefit the hotel and meet the customer's expectations. It is commonly accepted that without a well-designed plan, service quality cannot be effective. The plan must include staff's performance, as well as the co-ordination between departments and service standards. The key to competitive advantage in the hotel industry is largely a result of a superior plan, which must fit the particular circumstances of front-line departments. Only the planner who is directly involved can decide whether those circumstances warrant performance. According to Ross (1993:39), the service quality plan requires a definition of the customer's environment and quality that can be directed to the customer's needs. A service quality plan ensures that services are adjusted to meet changes in technology, the regulatory environment and customer requirements.

#### **5.2 THE ELEMENTS OF SERVICE QUALITY PLANNING**

Service quality planning is composed of various elements. Every hotel has its own specific format of planning, depending upon what issues need particular emphasis; the sophistication of planning in the hotel; and how planning responsibility is delegated. The format of the plan should be shaped to the needs of the individual user, and basic issues of the plan should be profitable and customer-oriented. The following elements of the plan can be adopted in a hotel:

### **5.2.1 The Current State of Service Quality**

This element should bring the staff up to date on important trends that have determined the current state of service quality in hotels and offer some insight into where it might be heading. Possible areas to cover include (Rust, *et al.* 1994:127):

- The market's size, growth, profitability and costs.
- Competitive activity, including changes in quality-related activities, pricing approaches, distribution channels and promotion methods.
- Changes in the nature of demand and supply.
- Influences of technology.
- Changing political and regulatory climate.

### **5.2.2 Situation Analysis**

Analysing pertinent data to understand the dynamics of the market should be presented in order to support the choice of objectives. The list of topics to be considered includes (Rust, *et al.* 1994:127):

#### **(a) Hotel attractiveness analysis**

- Hotel market, growth rate, and stage of the service.
- The pressure of competitive force on profit levels in the industry, such as the costs of quality programs and the price customers will pay for quality.



- The future of relevant trends in the environment, for example: technological development and political and regulatory restrictions.

(b) Customer analysis

A description of the major segments into which a hotel separates its customers should be clear.

- Type of customers.
- The service of the customers' perception.
- Motivation for the purchase.
- Process of the purchase, and
- Frequency of the purchase.

(c) Sales analysis

What percentage of profit increases has been due to market size growth, share growth, price increases, cost reductions and productivity improvements (McDonald, 1990:5-18), and how do profit and costs differ?

(d) Competitor analysis

Hotels should always summarise the objectives and strategies of their competitors, and the strengths and weaknesses on the dimensions that will affect their ability to compete effectively.

### 5.2.3 Objectives of Planning

Objectives must be consistent if they are to lead to success. Therefore, the plan should present objectives from those at the corporate level to those of the various functional areas. It should list:

- The hotel's mission statement/vision
- Co-operative objectives
- Functional area objectives (e.g. management, marketing, operations and finance)
- Objectives for the individual departments.

#### **5.2.4 Action Programs**

In order to reach the various objectives, the action programs should be broken down into their component parts - in particular, marketing, management, operation and finance.

The marketing section should describe how the hotel will attract and retain customers; the management section focuses on how senior staff will lead the hotel; the operational section describes how operations will be managed; as well as what materials and equipment will be used; and the financial section's detail will contain programs to reduce debt or raise equity (Rust, et al. 1994:129).

#### **5.2.5 Measurements**

An effective plan should include the following measurements (Rust, et al. 1994:129):

- Measures of marketplace performance.
- Necessary data to improve the use of the quality analysis.
- Customer satisfaction measures, and
- Internal service quality measures.

### **5.3 THE PROCESS OF SERVICE QUALITY PLANNING**

Service quality requires the involvement of everyone in the front-line departments. It follows that everyone must be involved in some way in the planning process. Rust et al. (1994:117) emphasised that each hotel must design a planning process that fits its own culture and personality. The key to a successful plan does not lie so much in the contents thereof, but in the manner in which it is developed. Experienced planners agree on several key steps. The following processes outline a general plan for service quality improvement, which can be adapted to many hotel environments:

#### **5.3.1 Analysing the Service Situation**

Managers must be keenly aware of how well the last plan has fared, and check that predicted programs have met hotel objectives and customer satisfaction levels. Both failures and successes should be carefully noted and learned from to design action programs for the next plan.

The analysis of hotel strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats is an effective way to forecast the current service situation. In other words, the service must be matched to available opportunities to optimise its prospects for competitive success. According to Rust et al. (1994:121), the analysis should focus on the key elements that will give the hotel a profitable differential advantage with customers, rather than provide many unrelated points.

#### **5.3.2 Collecting Data**

Collecting appropriate information about hotel services is an essential part of any planning exercise. Rust et al. (1994:118-120) identify the following as some of the areas in which information should be collected:



#### **5.3.2.1 Market dynamics**

Hotels should keep track of the market's growth rate and its components. Economic and social trends, new technology, relevant regulatory and political developments should also be predicted in order to keep track of these important influences in the market and the environment.

#### **5.3.2.2 Sales analysis**

Hotels should be able to analyse what part of their growth or decline can be attributed to various quality efforts. All the sales data should be obtained by market segment analysis, by service, as well as by the hotel industry nationwide.

#### **5.3.2.3 Customer factor**

Since satisfying customers is a major part of the plan, managers need to monitor customer satisfaction with current services, as well as customers' future needs and desires with separate analysis for each key segment.

#### **5.3.2.4 Staff factor**

Analysis of staff satisfaction with services provided by other departments should be an ongoing part of quality monitoring, along with more operationally defined measures of support quality, such as the number of defects or processing time.

#### **5.3.2.5 Product and service quality**

Regular tracking of customer reactions to service quality and the control of internal quality measures will provide this information.

#### **5.3.2.6 Suppliers**

Measures of supplier quality and assessment of relationships with suppliers can be used to identify quality problems and to determine future quality initiatives.

#### **5.3.2.7 Competition**

Competitor analysis requires the identification of those hotels where customers feel the best products and services are offered. A well-structured plan should be in place to monitor their strategies, strengths, weaknesses, and activities in the market.

#### **5.3.2.8 Benchmarks for processes**

The areas to be benchmarked should be closely linked to quality strategy goals, so that time and money are not wasted. A hotel should not limit itself to its own industry, but should study any hotel in the world from which it can learn how to improve.

#### **5.3.2.9 Cost of quality**

Hotel managers should identify sources of poor quality and try to find the way to reduce the cost of poor quality.

### **5.3.3 Developing Objectives**

The critical part of the planning process is the setting of objectives and the formulation of a plan based on the analysis of the current state of quality service. To ensure the co-operation between many planned performances throughout the hotel, it is essential that the goals for individual departments and services be consistent with the hotel's overall direction. Customer-oriented quality service is central to every department's goals, and corporate-level objectives must stress quality, customer satisfaction, and customer retention among the overriding concerns. Once the higher-level, long-term objectives are established, then lower-level and short-term objectives in individual departments can be developed in accordance with the top objectives. Departmental managers need to let top management know what their objectives of the plan are; and top management should use its expertise to help department managers set priorities, and to guide and suggest improvements before unacceptable initiatives are developed too far (Rust, et. al 1994:121).

In particular, to improve the retention rate of current customers, management must decide whether to emphasise solving problems (decreasing the number of dissatisfied customers) or enhancing services (to delight customers with various aspects of the service). Rust, et al. (1994:128) pointed out that these objectives could be translated into internal operational objectives once the relationship between operations and customer reactions is understood.

### **5.3.4 Implementing the Plan**

As soon as the plan has been made, the implementation of the plan must follow in order to move individual groups toward increasing levels of self-managed teams; develop success criteria in the form of quality measures; determine skill



development needs for all staff; and outline the changes needed for support systems. Rider (1993:308-309) has suggested the following key actions to implement the plan:

- Communicate the service quality plan to all staff in front-line departments.
- Implement improvements in the work process, equipment, and staff utilisation.
- Implement changes required in support systems.
- Customise and further detail the design by each self-managed team.
- Provide training and development for all levels, including basic skills, technical skills, team skills and leadership skills.
- Facilitate the transition of increasing responsibility and authority to the self-managed teams.
- Jointly establish and communicate goals and measures.
- Determine methods of performance feedback and tracking.
- Recognise and reward as appropriate.

## **5.4 SERVICE PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

Service performance standards can be defined as performance dimensions in measurable or observable terms. There should be standards, measurable or observable standards, wherever possible to make evaluation of service performance more objectives.

Service performance standards stipulate that the service process should measure up to certain specifications, procedures and standards and this should be the criterion for staff performance. It generally includes operating rules, regulations, standard terms and conditions. Due to the fact that figures and instruments cannot easily measure service performance, a hotel usually constructs a series of service performance standards (Deng, 1989:214). Once the staff understand the service performance standards, and know how to

follow the principle of the standards, quality of service will be improved accordingly. Service quality is facilitated when presented in accordance with the conditions of service performance standards. In other words, service quality can be controlled when it is in the range of service performance standards.

#### **5.4.1 Setting of Service Performance Standards**

Service performance standards are the guidelines for staff to operate in hotels. Hence, they must be feasible and well designed. The basis of designing the standards can be analysed as follows (Deng, 1989:216-217):

- Marketing needs. To investigate and analyse the needs of customers.
- Hotel's system, style and character that can hold a competitive edge in the hotel market place.
- Hotel grading and quality planning. The higher the grade of hotels, the higher the standard of service performance.
- International standard of the hotel industry.
- The purpose and content of the service that should be identified.

Performance standards are a specialized and demanding form of communication, and putting them in writing may be the most difficult part of developing a performance standard system, but must be precisely annotated to make things clear for every staff member.

### 5.4.2 Requirements of Service Performance Standards

Miller, Porter and Drummond (1992:136) described the requirements of service performance standards as follows:

- The statement must be specific, clear, complete, and accurate. It must tell the staff exactly what service the customer needs.
- The standard of performance must be measurable or observable. "Good" and "Well" are not measurable or observable, because they are subjective judgements. "Correct" and "Accurate" are measurable if there are standards, for example, a set of instructions, a diagram, or mathematical accuracy.
- The standard must be attainable. It must be within the physical and mental capabilities of the staff and the conditions of the job.
- The standard must conform to hotel policies, goals and applicable legal and moral constraints. It must not require or imply any action that is legally or morally wrong.
- Certain kinds of standards must have a time limit set for achievement.

Service performance standards can be developed for each job in a department or operation and are used in hiring, training, directing, and evaluating staff. It is a requirement for excellence, the morale and well-being of the staff, as well as the hotel.



### 5.4.3 Implementing Service Performance Standards

Once service performance standards have been set up, staff must implement them accordingly. Any violations should be corrected without delay. Service performance standards must be strictly implemented right from the beginning. The following methods can be considered (Deng, 1989:218-220):

- Informing staff to realise the importance of the standards and regard them as a basic need for improving their knowledge and skills.
- Training recruits to be familiar with service performance standards. Only when the staff know service performance standards, can they start approaching customers.
- Managers should control service quality in accordance with service performance standards and timeously show whether standards are well implemented.
- Service performance standards can be set as a judgement for examining staff performance.

After fine-tuned service performance standards have been established, the front-line staff in a hotel will have a permanent set of instruments for describing jobs, defining a fair day's work for each job, training staff to the standards, evaluating performance and rewarding achievement (Miller, et al. 1992:140). If the levels of performance have changed, evaluating, updating and modifying of service performance standards are necessary. If managers can communicate to the staff and establish a way of life, the best service performance standards will be obtainable.

## **5.5 SERVICE QUALITY AND COMPETITIVE STRATEGIES**

It has been confirmed in the hotel industry that improved service quality will strengthen a hotel's competitiveness. Lockwood, Gummesson, Hubrecht and Senior (1992:312-337) support the significance of the statement that it is only fully evident when service quality is a mixture of objective knowledge and subjective perceptions through experience, emotions, word of mouth, promotional campaigns and rumours. To the strategic hotelier, service quality must always be judged against the standard set by the competition. DeSouza (1989:21) defines three factors of quality:

- Quality is performance as perceived by the customers;
- It is measured relative to competition; and
- It is balanced against price to provide "value".

In the hotel industry, service is a commodity and is also a basis for competition. In order to succeed in today's extremely competitive environment, hotels must develop a strategy to defeat their competitors and establish a position of competitive superiority. Outstanding service quality can provide a competitive edge by using three possible strategies:

### **5.5.1 Cost-reduction**

The cost reducer strives to produce service and goods more cheaply than competitors. Hotels stress having efficient-scale facilities, pursuing cost reductions and minimising the expenses of production, service, selling, training and advertising (Schuler and Harris, 1992:103). Despite the common misconception that it costs more to deliver high-quality service, high quality

goes hand in hand with high productivity and, thus, lowers costs. In fact, it is poor quality and the problems that accompany it that lead to higher costs.

Low service quality will cause low customer turnover. In hotels, poor service is often the major cause of losing a customer. Replacing lost customers is not the only cost of poor service. A hotel with low service quality will also tend to spend a great deal of time correcting errors and have a high overall rate of employee turnover. A reputation for poor service will doom a hotel to continually higher costs for years (Sherden, 1988:47).

### **5.5.2 Quality Enhancement**

Schuler and Harris (1992:103-104) stated that the quality enhancer attempts to deliver a service with the highest possible quality. Quality enhancement depends on close co-operation not only among all segments of the hotel, but ensures that the desired services are delivered to the customer, when the customer wants them; and that they meet the customer's specifications. The strategy of quality enhancement plays an important role in the competitive market.

### **5.5.3 Differentiation of the Service Offering**

Today's customers will pay more for perceived higher service quality. The different characters of hotels, based on service quality, can bring different benefits (Sherden, 1988:46). It is essential to differentiate a service to fit a specified group of customers and to be unique in comparison with competitors (Lockwood et al. 1992:317).

Services are extremely hard to differentiate, because any new feature is easily copied by competitors. One of the most effective ways to win the competitive



edge is by providing a bold and different type of service, by clearly doing something that no one else was doing and by positioning a particular hotel in the customer's mind as the innovator (DeSouza, 1989:23). Hotels with exceptional differentiation of service quality can enjoy stronger customer loyalty.

## **5.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter intended to emphasise those aspects of planning that are most important for improving service quality in hotel front-line departments. Each hotel has its own specific format of planning, depending on what particular emphasis is placed on the hotel. Service quality planning relies on how well the process is deployed throughout the front-line departments in hotels.

Service performance standards include service standardisation, serialisation and systematisation. They must be well formulated in order to set and evaluate the staff's performance.

Faced with rapidly increasing competition, the South African hotel industry simply has no choice but to improve service quality through a well-designed plan. The three possible strategies – cost-reduction, quality enhancement and differentiation of the service, will be a source of significant competitive advantage.

Hotels must ensure that there are plans in place to ensure the continued improvement of their staff. The measurement and control of service quality can create a total change for a hotel. In the next chapter the measurement and control of service quality will be dealt with.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **SERVICE QUALITY MEASUREMENT AND CONTROL**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Service quality planning is an important part of every hotel's management process. Its sole purpose is to improve the service performance of the hotel's front-line departments. It must be ensured that all staff members in the hotel should see service in terms of the processes and dimensions that are important to the customer. The key to making a plan work is less in the contents of the plan than in the manner in which it is developed. The measurement and control of service quality is the indispensable step after the plan has been carried out. The concern of service quality measurement and control is discussed in the chapter.

#### **6.2 QUALITY MEASUREMENT**

Measuring service quality of the front-line staff is a starting point in defining service deficiencies. Once quality has been measured, the correct process in terms of service performance can be refined to ensure a comprehensive and accurate assessment of service quality. The control of service quality can provide the evidence needed to establish confidence that the quality-related activities --- quality planning, quality control, quality improvement, and reliability -- are being performed effectively. For this reason, hotels must develop quality measurement and control systems to analyse current performance and trends and assess the performance of individual staff (Sherden, 1988:48). Generally, the service plan, analysis, and performance standards are the three main factors in measuring and assuring the service's achievement of a competitive advantage.

In the literature, a number of conceptual works and instruments, used to measure service quality have been presented and defined by researchers. Parasuraman, et al. (1985:41-50) confirmed that customers assess service quality by comparing perceived service performance with what was expected or desired. Gronroos (1982:9) stated that the customer perceives service quality in the comparison between the expected service, which the customer expects to get, and the perceived service, which the customer feels that he/she has received. Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel and Gutman (1985:99-111) observed that customers evaluate service quality through their perceptions of the performance of the service. Therefore, service quality is defined as the outcome of a comparison between expectations of a service and what is perceived to have been received (Mackay and Crompton, 1988:43).

However, it was observed in chapter 4 that the research by Parasuraman et al. (1985:41-50) has indicated that five dimensions of service quality can be quantified by the measurement of expectations and the perception of performances. The items used to measure the desired service quality are as follows (Mackay and Crompton, 1990:52):

(a) TANGIBLES:

- The facility should be visually aesthetically attractive.
- The staff should be well dressed and appear neat.
- The equipment provided by the department should be up-to-date.
- The facility should be comfortable.
- The other tangible materials should be satisfied.

(b) RELIABILITY

- The facility/program should start on time.
- Information provided should be accurate.
- What is promised should be delivered.



- The staff should perform duties consistently well.
- The department should be concerned with quality control.

(c) RESPONSIVENESS

- The staff should be willing to make an extra effort to help customers.
- The staff should take time with customers.
- The staff should respond to requests quickly.
- Problems should be solved quickly.
- The department should act on customers' suggestions.

(d) ASSURANCE

- The staff should be polite.
- The staff should be trustworthy.
- The staff should be competent.
- The staff should be credible.
- The staff should be enthusiastic.

(e) EMPATHY

- The staff should give individual attention to customers.
- The staff should understand customer needs.
- The program/service should be offered at a convenient time.
- The program/facility should be at a convenient location.
- The staff should make the customer feel comfortable.

Thus, it should be possible to conduct regular service standards using these five items as the basis for measuring service performance. Each of the dimensions can be quantified by obtaining measures of expectations about hotels in general and perceptions about the particular hotel whose service quality is being assessed; and calculating the difference between expectations

and perceptions of actual performance on these attributes (Bolton and Drew, 1991:376).

### **6.3 THE PERSPECTIVES OF MEASUREMENT**

Hotels wishing to improve service quality must first assess their customers' perceptions of existing quality. Perceptions are determined by the customers' expectations before the service is provided and how well the service actually meets these expectations. It is difficult to know which improvements will be truly effective without feedback from the users of the service. The only sure way a hotel can know if it is meeting the service expectations of its customers, is to measure customers' perceptions of its service quality.

#### **6.3.1 Customers' Measurement of Service Quality**

Since service quality relates to the customers' needs and expectations, the standards adopted by the hotel are mostly established by its customers. There is a tendency to concentrate on the dimensions of quality where customer preferences can be easily measured (see paragraph 6.2). The major problem facing the front-line staff is identifying what it is that the customer wants from a hotel.

Service quality appears to include tangible elements and intangible elements. Judging from the National Accommodation Guide by the South African Tourism Board (1994:186-189), a hotel is highly oriented towards the tangible elements of provision, but the less tangible elements such as style, elegance or comfort are what attract customers to hotels. Nightingale's study (1985:9-22) tends to support this view. The characteristics of quality perceived by customers in his study of businessmen staying in a large city hotel, were prioritised as follows:

- Availability of service
- Smooth, fast response
- Convenience
- Comfortable, pleasant and relaxing
- Provision of reasonable facilities
- Spaciousness
- Value for money
- Adequate choice.

These findings suggest that, to maintain customer satisfaction in a hotel, the facilities must be clean, comfortable, sufficiently equipped, safe and secure. The service provided by the staff must be friendly, efficient, and professional. Service quality is dependent upon the quality of both the tangible and the intangible elements of contact with the hotel's facilities and staff (see Fig.6.1).

It is clear that good housekeeping, well-equipped facilities and excellent service will always be key elements in measuring quality in any hotel experience, and customers perceive both tangible and intangible elements as important to service quality. The intangible elements are frequently more decisive in choosing between alternative service offerings.



**FIGURE 6.1**  
**HOTEL QUALITY MATRIX**

**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXPERIENCE**

		Tangible	Intangible
Nature of the contact	Product	The product Facilitating goods Information	Atmosphere Aesthetics Comfort
	Service	Actions Process Speed Script	Warmth Friendliness Care Service

**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM LOCKWOOD ET AL. (1992:317)**

### **6.3.2 Management's Measurement of Service Quality**

The customer usually assesses service quality by comparing expectations with actual perceptions of staff performance, whereas hotel management tests service quality by judging performances against certain standards, namely: personal staff qualities and knowledge; speed and efficiency; systems and procedures; technology and product range. Although quality standards are often determined by the grading systems used for categorising hotels, the hotel management at all levels can do a great deal to adjust its standards. The staff's appearance, attitude, as well as the equipment of the hotel can be

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measured by the management in accordance with the service performance standards (see paragraph 5.4) and the ratio of customer complaints.

The methods of hotel quality management can be seen as a matrix with a dimension relating to the level of tangible provision, and a dimension relating to the type of contact the customer has in the hotel (Jones and Lockwood, 1989:167). Hotel management associates the tangible elements with the activities taking place back-of-house; and intangible elements with the activities performed front-of-house. Jones and Lockwood's study (1989:154) shows that the tangible elements are more controllable than the intangible elements. Likewise, the intangible elements are more significant than the tangible contact. Examples of tangible contact are few, for instance porters carrying luggage and receptionists filling in registration forms for customers. By its very nature social interaction is highly subjective and intangible.

In order to measure service quality accurately, the following elements should be emphasised:

- Creating an atmosphere of all working towards a common goal;
- Understanding the work of others; and
- Encouraging all front-line staff to assume responsibility and authority for achieving corporate objectives -- which includes empowering employees to exercise judgement and creativity in responding to customer needs (Lewis, 1993:7).

In the reality of the hotel structure, it appears that management usually measures service quality heavily on the basis of some elements of service, such as the staff's appearance, the decorations of the lobby and the atmosphere of the dining room.



### **6.3.3 Front-line Staff's Measurement of Service Quality**

The ability of a hotel to ensure that the service delivered meets the specifications set, depends on the performance of all staff, who must be willing and able to deliver the desired level of service; and also on the development of appropriate personnel policies for recruitment, selection, training, motivation and rewards for all staff (Lewis, 1993:7-8). The effectiveness of service measurement will in turn be affected by the interaction of the skills and abilities of the individual and his work group, the work design, the hotel climate as a whole, and the scheduling of the workforce to meet expected customer demands.

Lewis and Entwistle (1990:41-52) focus on service relationships within organisations which contribute to the quality of service delivered to customers. This includes the relationship between front-of-house and back-of-house staff; operations- and non-operations staff; and between staff and management at all levels of the hotel. The management of the hotel must realise the importance of a motivated staff in the front-line departments, and that personnel should have both the requisite capabilities and the confidence to perform well. It is necessary to create an atmosphere of a good team spirit and good interpersonal relationships and communications between customer-contact and non-contact staff (Lewis, 1993:8). The relationship between management and personnel perceptions affects morale and motivation, quality of work and, subsequently, the quality of service provided to customers.

## **6.4 ASSESSMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY**

The assessment of service quality in the hotel industry is a way of appraising the various types of information and data available, particularly those referring to the position of the front-line staff. This information and data are the major resources to assess the actual quality of service in the hotel. They include:

service performance evaluation (restaurant) (see table 6.1), quality control check sheet (see table 6.2) and a customer comment form (see table 6.3). All this information and data are important components of the assessment and improvement of service quality.

Available information and data will contain valuable details for the assessment of service quality. Various types of interviews, polls and questionnaires can be used as methods by which service quality is surveyed. The form of this type of data collection has played a dominant role in assessing service quality. The observation of service quality can be used to describe all the methods of collecting information and data by means of direct/indirect participation. Nyquist, Bitner and Booms (1985:75) described an indirect observational technique in which in-depth interviews with the relevant parties (customers and staff) are used to gain an understanding of effective and ineffective behaviour in a given situation. This form of indirect observation may be extremely useful at certain stages in the assessment.

The construction of an assessment model in service quality can be established as (Edvardsson and Gustavsson, 1991:329):

- An assessment of quality in a hotel which must be based on a holistic view of the hotel and its operational logic.
- The assessment must be multi-dimensional, for instance, not merely in terms of customer perception.
- The process must be operationalized in the form of a dialogue with representatives of the hotel being assessed.
- The range and depth of the analysis ultimately determines the tools and techniques to be used.

In the South African hotel industry, the National Grading and Classification Scheme (SATOUR, 1993) is the way to assess service quality in order to determine the difference between actual service and the service that was

planned. The methods of service quality assessment can be outlined as follows:

(a) Establishing assessment systems

Inspectors or part-time inspectors can be assigned to examine the service quality, and meanwhile, the section leader, supervisor and manager all have responsibilities to assess their staff's operation. This must be formed as a network system (Deng, 1989:220).

(b) Choosing assessment methods

The service quality target or standard can be examined in accordance with the quality plan and performance standards. In the hotel, inspectors or managers can assess service quality through overall inspection or special items that they feel are important. In a hotel chain/group, the assigned person can go to or stay in the hotel as a customer or an inspector to examine the service quality.

(c) Feedback of assessment results

At the feedback meeting, results will be communicated to all staff, after which adjustments will be made by the staff to ensure a high quality of service in the future.

## **6.5 SERVICE QUALITY CONTROL**

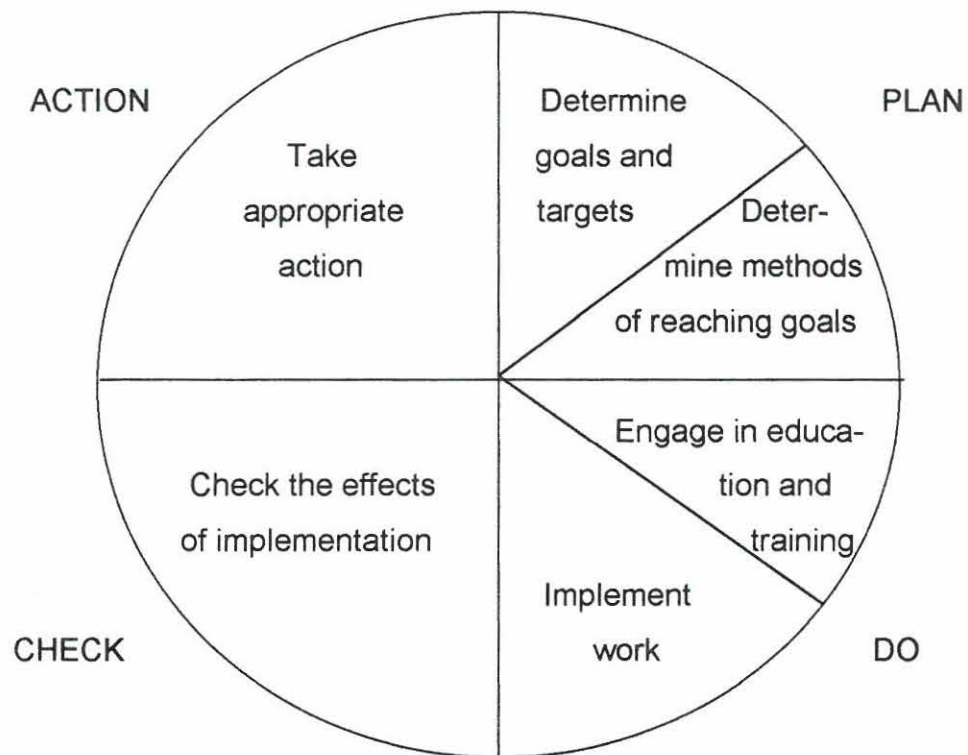
After service quality has been assessed, service quality control must be implemented. To ensure that high service quality standards are maintained, a hotel service quality controller regularly checks the staff's performance to ensure that the services the staff offer comply with the standards the customer demands.

In the international hotel industry, it is acknowledged that the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Action) circulating procedure (Deng, 1989:210) is an effective way of



managing service quality. Each circulation of the PDCA means that the service quality target has been reached at new stages. Ishikawa (1985:59-70) has redefined this circle by dividing it into six categories. The service quality control circle (see fig. 6.2) is based on the following six aspects:

**FIGURE 6.2**  
**SERVICE QUALITY CONTROL CIRCLE**



**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM ISHIKAWA (1985: 59)**

### **6.5.1 Determine Goals and Targets**

Demonstrate goals and targets to the staff, using concrete terms and figures; tell them everything they need to know, including information about personnel,

quality, cost, profit and form of services. Goals and targets are to be set on the basis of problems the hotel wishes to solve. It is far better to do it this way than to assign separate goals for different departments and hotels (Ishikawa, 1985:59), because established goals and targets must be closely related to departments and hotels in order to avoid irrelevancies.

### **6.5.2 Determine the Methods of Reaching Goals**

Before determining the methods, the hotel management must standardise the methods and fashion them into a service standard system, and then incorporate this into the hotel's daily performance. The task of establishing standardisation should be done in order to delegate authority to the staff (Ishikawa, 1985:65). Reviewing and revising standards constantly will help managers and staff to define the method of reaching goals.

### **6.5.3 Engage in Education and Training**

A superior must educate his subordinate on a one-to-one basis through actual work. Once the subordinate is educated in this manner, delegate authority to him and let him have the freedom to do his job. This form of management creates a situation in which everyone is well trained, can be trusted and need not be supervised excessively. Through education and training, subordinates become reliable, and the span of control (the number of people one person can supervise directly) becomes larger.

### **6.5.4 Implement Work**

Under normal conditions, implementation should pose no problem if everything is done according to the planned procedure, but it quite often appears that

standards and regulations are inadequate. The manager can force staff to implement work by giving an order, but the staff will not react according to the given command, because conditions change constantly. Commands given by superiors or managers can be irrelevant to changing conditions.

#### **6.5.5 Check the Effects of Performance**

If service quality is improving according to the goals set and according to the standards, then the services will be no problem. However, when unusual events occur, for example, there is no room for the booked customer, then the manager must check these promptly. The purpose of checking is to discover problems. In order to perform the work efficiently, the goals, standardization and training procedures must all be clearly understood.

According to Ishikawa (1985:67-69), there are two ways to check performance:

- Check the level of performance. The service quality controller must check each process of service performance, for example, the planning and service operation, to see whether levels are up to standard.
- Check by way of the effects of performance. Hotel managers, and department managers must check all the processes of service by way of the effects of performance. Among the effects are matters relating to personnel (such as, rate of attendance, number of proposals presented); service quality; quantity; labour; materials required for service units and cost. Feedback on the checked effects of performance should be given to the departments and staff concerned.



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### **6.5.6 Take Appropriate Action**

After checking the effects of performance, appropriate remedial action must be taken. The action includes adjustment of the process and prevention of recurrence. Dealing with customer complaints (see paragraph 6.6) is the key for this action. Prevention of recurrence is a vitally important concept of service quality control.

## **6.6 DEALING WITH CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS**

Generally, most customers do not complain to hotel management, but reserve their complaints for their friends. In other words, their complaints are latent or hidden. The manager of the hotel must, therefore, convince every staff member that one should welcome and even seek customer comments and complaints in order to regard these as a learning opportunity (Walker, 1990:107). There is no doubt that if services are improved in accordance with the complaints of customers, the customers will continue to come back to the hotel. Hiding or ignoring complaints will cause potential complaints. In the hotel industry, if one does not have good quality assurance programs, "there are ten times more potential complaints than actual complaints. These actual complaints are nothing but the tip of the iceberg" (Ishikawa, 1985:83). In order to change potential complaints into actual complaints, one must actively gather information concerning complaints and make them public. Walker (1990:108) identified that the analysis of customer complaints should be widely circulated to service managers and communicated to front-line staff. It is they who have to respond to the complaints and do things differently in future.

Some systematic ways to deal with complaints are set out below (Walker, 1990:110-111):

- (a) Log the complaint:
- Who received it.
  - How it was received (telephone, letter, direct).
  - Nature of complaint (full description).
  - Date/time of complaint.
  - Any interim "fix-it" action required.
- (b) Inform the customer that someone is dealing with the complaint, the likely timescale and any immediate action taken.
- (c) If the staff member cannot solve the problem, send a copy of the details to the staff member who can.
- (d) Note any action taken at the time of the complaint to attempt to solve the problem.
- (e) Complete notes on how the problem is resolved.
- (f) Write/speak to the customer to tell him/her what action has been taken,
- to solve the problem
  - to resolve any underlying causes of the problem
  - to provide compensation.
- (g) Send the person who received the complaint a copy of the form showing the action taken and, where appropriate, a copy of the letter to the customer.
- (h) Ensure the complaint has been analysed and fed into a central data system. No matter how small the organisation, keeping a record of complaints is worthwhile so those trends can be identified.



## 6.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored three views: Firstly, dimensions of service quality can be quantified by obtaining measures of expectations and perceptions of the performance level. Analysing different perspectives of the measurement will be conducive to the improvement of service quality. Once quality has been measured, the standard performance can be refined to ensure a comprehensive and accurate assessment of service quality. Secondly, the control of service quality is the final, important management function to ensure that a hotel's goals and standards are met. In this regard, it is important to remember that service quality control is action oriented and also oriented toward the future. Thirdly, hotel staff and managers should welcome or even seek customer complaints, which should become an important part of strategy in improving service quality.

Measuring and controlling service quality can ensure standardised service performance, but fundamental work to improve a staff's service quality lies in the hotel's orientation and skills training program. The following chapter will discuss training, which includes developing a training program that begins with a needs analysis, continues with a training plan and concludes with the training methods employed to improve service quality.

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**TABLE 6.1**

**SERVICE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of hire: \_\_\_\_\_ Yearly evaluation: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Please use COMMENT section "Exceeds", or "Meets" or "Does Not Meet".  
POINTS: Exceeds -- 5. Meets -- 3. Does not meet -- 0.

Performance standards	Exceeds	Meets	Does not meet
1. Supplies a serving area for one meal completely and correctly in 10 minutes or less.	_____	_____	_____
	<u>Comments:</u>		
2. Sets or resets a table properly in not more than 3 minutes.	_____	_____	_____
	<u>Comments:</u>		
3. Greets guests cordially within 5 minutes after they are seated and takes their order if time permits; if too busy, informs that he or she will be back as soon as possible.	_____	_____	_____
	<u>Comments:</u>		
4. Explains menu to customers: accurately describes the day's specials and, if asked, accurately answers any questions on portion size, ingredients, taste, and preparation method.	_____	_____	_____
	<u>Comments:</u>		



5. Takes food, wine and beverage orders accurately and legibly for a table of up to six guests; prices and totals checked with 100 percent accuracy.	_____	_____	_____	<u>Comments:</u>
6. Picks up order and completes plate preparation.	_____	_____	_____	<u>Comments:</u>
7. Serves a complete meal to all persons at each table in not more than 1 hour per table.	_____	_____	_____	<u>Comments:</u>
8. If asked, recommends wines appropriate to menu items selected, opens and serves wines correctly.	_____	_____	_____	<u>Comments:</u>
9. Accepts and processes payment with 100 percent accuracy.	_____	_____	_____	<u>Comments:</u>
10. Performs side work correctly according to the side work assignments sheet.	_____	_____	_____	<u>Comments:</u>
11. Operates all equipment in the assigned area according to the safety manual.	_____	_____	_____	<u>Comments:</u>
12. Meets at all times the dress code requirements.	_____	_____	_____	<u>Comments:</u>
13. Uses at all times the sanitation procedures specified for serving personnel and maintains work area to score 90 percent or higher.	_____	_____	_____	<u>Comments:</u>

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 14. Maintains a customer complaint ratio of less than 1 per 200 customers served.              | <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px;"></div> <u>Comments:</u> |
| 15. Is absent from work less than 12 days in a year.   | <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px;"></div> <u>Comments:</u> |
| 16. Does not report unpunctually more than 12 times per year.                                  | <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px;"></div> <u>Comments:</u> |
| 17. Can always be found in work area during work hours or supervisor knows where he or she is. | <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px;"></div> <u>Comments:</u> |
| 18. Attends required meetings and training.  | <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px;"></div> <u>Comments:</u> |
| 19. Supervisor receives positive feedback from peers with minimal complaints.                  | <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px;"></div> <u>Comments:</u> |

**OVERALL RATING:**

Outstanding performance: 75-100 points (must meet or exceed all standards).

Good performance: 50-74 points.

Marginal performance, re-evaluate in 60 days: below 50 points.

Evaluator's comments:

---



---



---

Employee's comments: Please comment freely on this evaluation.

---

---

---

Employee's objectives: What would you like to accomplish in the next 12 months?

---

---

---

Employee's objectives for the next 12 months:

---

---

---

Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Evaluator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Reviewer

**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM MILLER, ET AL. (1992:233-234)**



**TABLE 6.2**  
**QUALITY CONTROL CHECK SHEET**

1. Location:

- Accessibility
- Location
- Parking and parking lights
- Surroundings
- Condition of parking lot

2. Receiving:

- Facilities
- Unloading
- Controls
- Distribution and storage

3. Serving line (cafeteria):

- Arrangement
- Identification of dishes with prices
- Service time
- Speed at which line moves
- Variety of dishes to select from
- Posting of entries with prices near entrance to speed up selection
- Are there waiters or waitresses to take trays to tables?
- Arrangements to speed up movement of line
- Do servers understand requests and serve promptly?
- Does cashier itemize dishes correctly and promptly?

4. Dining room service:

- Cleanliness of tables, chairs, booths
- Variety of menu: is there a choice?
- Waiting time to obtain a table

- Waiting time to have order taken
  - Waiting time to have order prepared
  - Waiting time to have waitress or waiter serve
  - Truth in menu: do the dishes served accurately reflect what is on the menu?
  - Is food hot or cold; satisfying quality?
  - Did customer receive the special dinner that was advertised?
  - Attitude of hostess
  - Attitude of waitress/waiter
  - Are exits clearly indicated?
  - Was the bill correct?
  - Atmosphere: noise, quiet, relaxed
  - Ventilation, drafts, comfortable
  - Was the salad bar adequate?
  - Waiting time to pay bill
5. Counter service:
- Cleanliness of counter
  - Variety of menu, choice
  - Waiting time to have order taken
  - Waiting time to have order filled
  - Waiting time to have order served
  - Attitude of counter person
  - Courtesy of counter person
  - Is cheque correct?
  - Quality of food
  - Cleanliness of dishes
  - Waiting time to pay bill

**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM ROSANDER (1985:123)**

**TABLE 6.3**  
**CUSTOMER COMMENT FORM**

<b>Reservation</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Was your reservation handled – Promptly?	___	___
Courteously?	___	___
Efficiently?	___	___
Reservation made through _____		
<b>Reception and services</b>		
Did you receive prompt and courteous attention from		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Parking attendant?	___	___
Doorman?	___	___
Room clerk?	___	___
Bellman?	___	___
Maid service?	___	___
Cashier?	___	___
Elevator service?	___	___
Telephone service?	___	___
Room service?	___	___
Laundry service?	___	___
Valet service?	___	___
Other (specify)?	___	___
_____		
<b>Restaurants and bars</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Was service courteous and efficient?	___	___
Was food attractively served?	___	___
Was quality satisfactory?	___	___
Name of restaurant or bar	_____	

**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM ROSANDER (1985:122)**



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **STAFF TRAINING IN SERVICE QUALITY**

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Service quality training in the hotel industry can be defined as the process by which staff members acquire and develop knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to achieve a desired standard or level of performance. According to Byars and Rue (1987:198) training is a learning process that involves the acquisition of skills, concepts, rules, or attitudes to increase the performance of employees.

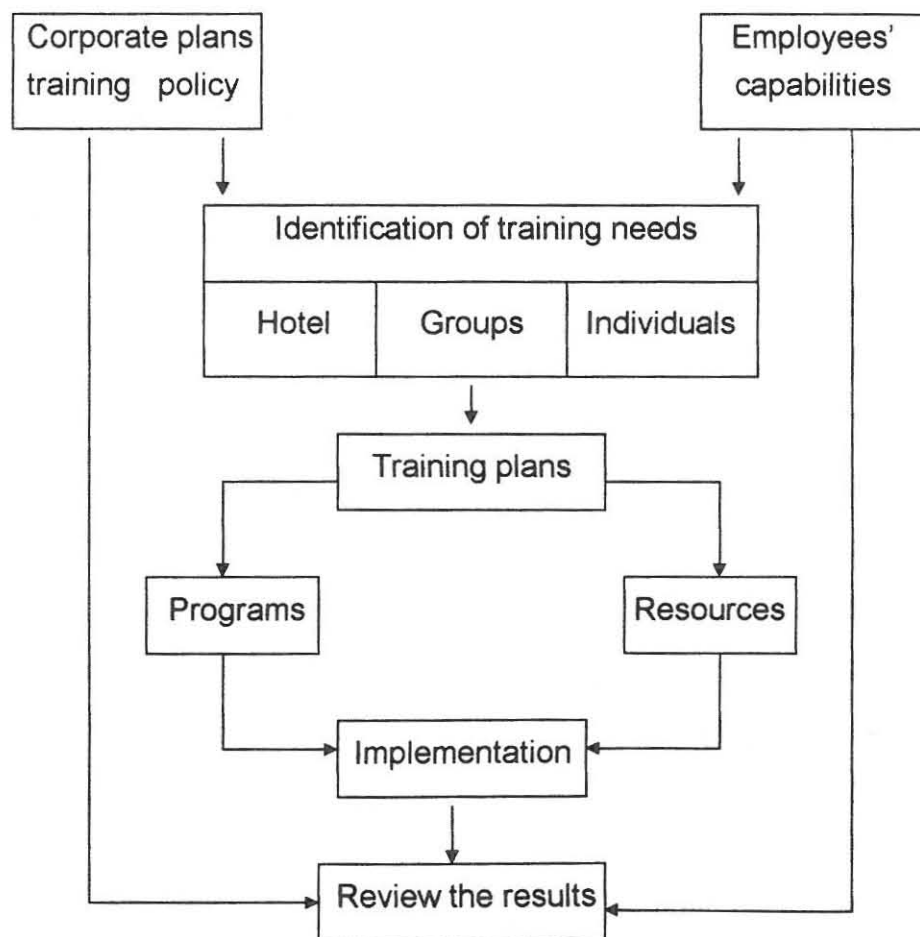
One of the objectives of hotel management should be to provide opportunities for the staff to optimise their performance in pursuit of the hotel's goals. Staff training in front-line departments can be the key to maintain an optimal level of performance in a hotel, because it can provide major benefits in improving service quality through increasing knowledge and skills, and forming the desired attitudes. Three functions of training should be realised: Firstly, it can be used to correct sub-standard services identified during performance reviews; secondly, it can be used to prepare for change, for example, for the introduction of new technology or new working systems; and finally, it can be used to provide development for the individual as a form of reward (Jones and Lockwood, 1989:57). New staff must realise the positions they are working in and be taught what is expected of them. Experienced staff are also necessary when changes are made in such areas as the menu, services style or procedure, and every front-line staff member's skill must be updated as changes occur in the operation.

Training is a critical factor in the hotel industry. Training the front-line staff lies at the heart of improving customer service and keeping well-run operations afloat.

## 7.2 TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS

Before staff training can be planned and implemented, a thorough and accurate analysis of the training needs must first be expressed in terms of training objectives. The concepts, knowledge, skills and personal attitude to be learnt must be specified (Watson, 1979:120). The training needs process in Fig. 7.1 can be divided into three broad areas.

**FIGURE. 7.1**  
**IDENTIFYING TRAINING NEEDS**



**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM BOELLA (1987: 112)**

The first step is identifying the training needs of the hotel, for example, improved customer relations. Such a need may affect all staff. The second is identifying the training needs of the department, for example, the front-office department may need training in maximising room occupancy. The third is that of individual need, for example, the proposal to computerise the payroll could result in the need for the payroll clerk to be trained in appropriate computer skills (Boella, 1987:111). If training needs are not or can't be analysed, incomplete assumptions will result as to the type of training required.

### **7.2.1 Methods of Conducting Training Needs**

Once managers of front-line departments observe signals that training may be needed, it is good practice to take additional time to carefully identify the specific problems. By identifying the key performance characteristics needed for success, the hotel can plan its training program and help staff to make the best possible contribution to customer needs (Linton, 1993:70). There are four methods that can be used to conduct a thorough needs analysis:

#### **7.2.1.1 Training needs surveys**

Surveys may be conducted to objectively focus on the performance deficiency of front-line departments. The managers of the departments will conduct surveys on training needs. Forrest (1990:10) stated that the surveys may consist of written questionnaires or personal interviews with the managers and staff. Personal interviews provide more opportunities for probing into the real causes of performance problems and reducing the likelihood of treating symptoms rather than the real problems. The methods of questionnaires and interviews with the staff are useful for gathering training needs information, because of the large amount of data that can be easily and cheaply collected.



### **7.2.1.2 Service performance appraisals**

When service performance appraisals are used properly, they will help to identify individual staff who need training. Under this method, staff are identified for training when their performance appraisals consistently reveal problems with certain tasks or behaviours (Woods, 1992:167). If managers find that the staff are not up to par and may require additional training, the specific problems that are causing the poor performance must be identified. A very effective way to determine specific training needs is by observing the staff at work in the areas where the deficiencies exist. In routine service performance, managers can appraise the work being performed and judge whether it meets established hotel standards. Analysing data of service performance is also the way of determining and pinpointing individual training needs, since such data is often collected in the routine services. It includes sales, customer complaints, comments, performance evaluation, turnover and waste reports (Woods, 1992:167).

### **7.2.1.3 Staff skills and attitude surveys**

Conducting surveys on staff skills and attitudes is one of the most common methods of assessing training needs. These surveys can measure the staff's ability to perform a certain task in a certain way (Woods, 1992:167), and can be an effective means of determining when training is required to improve the service quality.

The skill survey is based on the need to identify the personal abilities needed in relation to the performance. It reflects the current service standards of the hotel. The attitude survey is useful in finding out what staff like and dislike about the job. It can be useful in developing training programs that increase staff satisfaction.



#### **7.2.1.4 Customer comments collection**

Customer complaints serve as a signal that something is wrong and that the needs of these customers are not being met. The collected comments can be compiled to determine whether a complaint is an isolated incident, or whether it occurs enough to indicate a need for training.

An excellent approach for conducting training needs is to take customer opinion into consideration. Iverson (1989:198) believes that a simple way to generate data is to talk informally with some customers, and check with customer comment cards. By identifying trends of customer comments, Linton (1993:70) has defined the following three critical areas:

- If customers feel that hotel staff need support for their own operations, the training program will focus on project management or supervisory skills, rather than technical skills.
- If the customer decides that the staff performance needs to be improved, the training emphasis will be on presentation and training skills.
- If clients identify a level of dissatisfaction with the service, then it is more important that training concentrates on the technical skills needed to operate at higher standards.

#### **7.2.2 Phenomena Suggesting Training Needs**

Training will not solve all staff performance problems. Many hotels assume that when difficulties arise, training is the answer, and so they arbitrarily develop programs that are unrelated to the true source or cause of the problem. When staff development fails to solve the problem, it is often said that

training is a waste of time. However, an analysis of the situation and the identification of the following phenomena will help the hotel avoid this pitfall (Forrest, 1990:8-10):

- *Customer Dissatisfaction.* Training may be in order when customers complain about the way they are treated by staff, or about the quality of the service as it relates to the work performed by the staff. By analyzing the cause of a negative comment, managers can determine whether the problem is the result of inadequate training.
- *Disorganization and Confusion.* When staff have difficulty working together, it may be because they have not been taught how to work as a team. The group may also be disrupted when certain staff members do not know how to perform their required job duties or tasks.
- *Low Morale.* When staff are unhappy with their jobs, it usually shows in poor performance. Inadequate training can be a cause of low morale, because it may cause staff to feel that the training is useless.
- *Low Sales.* Managers often calculate sales per staff hours worked. By doing so, they can quickly spot slippage in productivity. When a drop occurs in sales per staff hours worked, inadequate training may be the cause.
- *Low Efficiency.* Efficiency can be measured in several ways. Whatever measure is used, the measure should relate staff output to benefits gained by the operation. Where possible, training programs should be designed to increase revenue or reduce controllable expenses without increasing labour costs.
- *Sanitation Problems.* Staff must be taught to clean constantly when they are not busy attending to the needs of customers or other assigned

duties. An unsanitary operation almost always indicates that staff need training.

- *Miscellaneous Indicators.*

- Excessive staff turnover, absenteeism, overtime, or negative information collected in exit interviews.
- Staff grievances, discrimination charges, and unfair employment practices.
- A high frequency of work-related injuries, accidents, or illnesses.
- Substandard quality services.
- Excessive labour costs per occupied room, number of customers, or seat occupancy.
- Low number of repeat customers.
- Low business volumes when compared to the market.
- High level of staff theft.
- Problems of drug and alcohol abuse among the staff.
- Excessive energy and water consumption.
- Excessive damage to the furniture, fixtures, and equipment through improper cleaning or maintenance.

Abovementioned phenomena can often be seen in the hotel. It is important to analyse the situation when the phenomenon occurs and make it possible to develop training programs.

### **7.3 THE TRAINING PLAN CONCERNING SERVICE QUALITY**

The training plan is a practical document, which brings together all the training needs, derived from the service quality performance, measurement and other recognised sources. Robinson (1985:34) points out that it not only sets out what the needs are, how they were established and what standards are to be



achieved, but also indicates the means by which they are to be satisfied within the estimated time scales.

Training is an investment which must be systematically planned. It needs to be industry-related and to cope with the future plans and objectives of the hotel. Kamath (1990/91:103) believes that a training plan should rest on the following principles:

- Training must be planned and related to the continual improvement of customer service, to the hotel needs and the satisfaction of each staff member's ambitions.
- It must be practical in design.
- Training must provide an opportunity for staff to develop their skills and personality.
- Training needs to support team building. This is especially relevant in the front-line positions of the hotel where the entire operating body needs to function as a team in the provision and improvement of the standards of services provided.
- Training should form part of the lifeblood of the hotel, which implies that hoteliers need to be committed to providing time and money for training.

A training plan for service quality will differ from other training programs. It needs to be reconsidered in the context of the overall performance and the new service emphasis. The managers concerned should at least link their plan to the service situations in which the knowledge, skill and attitude of staff will be used. Hence, the training plan should be designed to enable all staff to perform

their service well and fully develop their capabilities. It consists of the following important procedures:

### **7.3.1 Analysing Service Performance**

Every performance consists of several different functions of service in a hotel. Analysing service performance means to determine which services are required for each specific performance and therefore what types of follow-up training will be implemented. Observing staff at work and analysing any problems with the performance will help identify individual staff members who need training. To achieve effective training, the trainer must first consider what level of performance should be observable after training is completed.

In performance-related skills training, the planning process should include a complete performance analysis to develop the basic tools or aids to be used by the trainer. These tools or aids include performance descriptions, specifications and standards (Forrest, 1990:16).

### **7.3.2 Determining the Training Goal**

A precise training goal should be stated in clear and measurable quantitative terms. In the hotel industry, training must develop the abilities that are essential for successful service performance. These abilities are the goal of effective staff training and constitute the basis for more specific training objectives. Forrest's (1990:16) example shows that a training goal for the front-office department might be: "the training will result in the reduction of guest complaints concerning the check-in and check-out processes". A training goal must be supported by specific training objectives, topics, demonstrations, and other exercises.

### **7.3.3 Selecting the Trainees**

The staff who participate in training ultimately determine whether the program is successful or not. Selection can be ongoing for different training programs (Woods, 1992:169). Hiring the best employees available is an important first step in helping to ensure staff attain competence. Thus, experienced staff should also be selected as trainees when promotions and new techniques are required. They are the main factors in improving service quality in hotels.

### **7.3.4 Defining Training Objectives**

Training objectives can fall into four categories: Firstly, objectives relate to how the trainees view the process. Secondly, objectives relate to the learning acquired during the training program. In some training programs, knowledge-acquisition is the ultimate objective. Thirdly, objectives relate to on-the-job behaviours, because service quality is often measured in terms of the degree of sincerity or friendliness displayed by customer-contact personnel; and lastly, the result-oriented objective is the most common type of objective. It can improve measurable outcomes of an individual or group, and improve the number of repeat customers (Woods, 1992:168-169).

Training objectives should state what would be expected of the staff. It should not be too general, but should address specific observable and measurable behaviour characteristics. Objectives should become the basis for assessing what the staff know before training and what they know at the conclusion of training. Buckley and Caple (1990:105) believe that three main objectives will be clear on completion of the training:

- The performance which trainees are expected to display at the end of the training.



- The conditions under which the staff will perform.
- The standards which the staff are expected to reach.

### **7.3.5 Setting Programs to Fulfil the Training Plan**

Once the objectives have been identified, it is helpful to draft an outline of the training program to provide staff with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes. Managers must actually design the instructional program and the learning activities. The staff skills to be developed should be arranged in logical order. Training materials should be prepared or assembled to support the learning activities.

There are no set rules for preparing programs to meet each sort of training that has been planned. If the hotel is relatively small, the training program could be well incorporated as part of the training plan. In many instances, a set of training programs can be easily separated. Some guidelines are as follows (Magurn, 1986/87:148):

- Set out briefly the results the manager or trainer expects to be achieved by the training.
- Draw up a timetable of events, covering dates, times and locations of the training, as well as the duration of each module.
- Specify what subjects are to be covered.
- Determine how the training is to be carried out.
- Identify, by name, those people who are to carry out the training.

- Build into each program the way in which its success can be assessed - by practical tests, projects, coaching and assessments.

### **7.3.6 Choosing the Training Methods**

Hotel operations may use various types of training methods, which could include group training methods that can be used to train many staff members at one time, self-study or on-the-job training programs. Forrest (1990:17) believes that a general rule for selecting a training method is that the level of sophistication should not exceed the sophistication of the trainees or the training abilities of the trainer. The methods and materials used in training should not be more complex than the duties or performance tasks that are being taught. It would be preferable and easier to have all the training methods linked to the learning objective in order to choose appropriate methods (Pont, 1991:13). Some different training methods, which can be used, will be discussed in paragraph 7.4.

### **7.3.7 Evaluating the Training**

Evaluating the training will help to determine the effectiveness of the learning. It is much easier to evaluate knowledge and skills than to assess attitude changes. For the knowledge component, written or oral questions may be used. They should test the key points and highlight any individual development points. For the skills component, a performance test may be used where by trainees carry out a task and they are observed and rated (Pont, 1991:17).

In order to assess performance after training, the trainer must know the level of performance before training begins. Training is effective to the extent that performance of the job after training is closer to the ideal than before the training was undertaken. An effective evaluation should occur before training,

so that behavioural reference points can be established, and progress should be evaluated throughout the training program (Forrest, 1990:23). Managers should know whether the training brings about the necessary change of service quality, and benefits the entire hotel. The four categories of training objectives mentioned in the chapter (reaction-based, learning-acquired, on-the-job-behaviours and results-oriented) form the basis for evaluating training programs. A successful evaluation should measure all four. To assess whether the training yielded the necessary change, Woods (1992:182) suggested that managers could look at the turnover rate to measure the effectiveness of training designed to encourage staff satisfaction. Productivity would provide a measurable criterion for evaluating training programs designed to reduce the time it takes to check in a customer or to prepare a meal. Quality can be measured through customer evaluation of goods and services. Costs are also an obvious measurable criterion.

The main objective of any training evaluation is for the individuals to realize their progress and their own development needs.

### **7.3.8 Preparing Training Budgets**

The training expense must be justified and the results must be worth more than the cost of the training. At the time when annual, quarterly and monthly budgets are developed, managers should assess their plans for training. It is unlikely that the budget will permit all of the training activities which a management team desires. This is why it is necessary to establish priorities for training activities and the use of available training funds. In determining training priorities, managers must decide what training costs the budget can absorb, as well as what costs will be incurred if training is not undertaken. Among the areas to be carefully evaluated when budgeting for training are those areas where performance deficiencies visibly affect customer satisfaction, customer or staff safety, or staff morale (Forrest, 1990:18).



It should be noted that training does cost a lot, but the cost of not training results in poor service and lost customers, and the risk that a lost customer may never return. Thus, the lost revenue from poor service far exceeds the cost of training staff properly.

## **7.4 TRAINING METHODS CONCERNING SERVICE QUALITY**

With the accelerated development of training-related technology, there is now a wide variety of training methods available. Each method is uniquely effective in producing results under different circumstances. The combination of more than one method allow for a greater degree of success during the implementation of staff training. According to Woods (1992:172), deciding which methods to use usually depends on the type of training intended, the trainees selected, the objectives of the training program, and the training environment. No single training method is appropriate for every situation.

When hotel managers select the training methods, which will be used during the improvement of service quality, it is essential that they consider the advantages and limitations associated with each of the methods. A certain amount of variety in the training methods used is also an important consideration, as different forms of learning experiences will appeal to different personalities. The key to successful training in service quality does not lie in particular methods. It lies in ensuring that the methods used will enable individual front-line staff to attain personal ambitions, as well as satisfy the needs of the hotel and customers (Morgan, 1993:98). It has become commonly accepted in staff training that learning by doing the "hands-on" approach or by getting personally involved is the most successful route to acquiring knowledge and skills, or to changing attitudes.

The popular training methods in the hotel industry are divided into: on-the-job training and off-the-job training. Hotel managers should follow several guidelines to choose the best method for any particular training program. To be effective, the training method should (Wayne, 1989:251):

- Motivate the trainee to improve his/her performance
- Clearly demonstrate desired skills
- Provide for active participation by the trainee
- Provide an opportunity to practise
- Provide timely feedback on the trainee's performance
- Provide some means for reinforcement while the trainee learns
- Be structured from simple to complex tasks
- Be adaptable to specific problems
- Encourage positive transfer from training to the job.

The techniques to be used depend on a variety of factors, including whether it is knowledge, skills or attitudes that are to be imparted and whether individuals or groups are to be trained.

#### **7.4.1 On-the-job Training**

In the hotel industry, the front-line staff's service is performed in direct contact with customers. For this reason much of the training of new staff members has to be performed "on-the-job", so that experience of dealing with customers can be obtained. On-the-job training, therefore, plays a vital part in the industry's approach to training (Boella, 1987:107), which should be conducted according to a definite, structured program by using job lists, job breakdowns, and job performance standards as learning guides.

With on-the-job training programs, trainees work together with an experienced staff member and learn procedures while watching, talking with, and helping

the experienced staff member. Since on-the-job training is a form of individualised learning, the trainer can design and pace the training to fit the needs of each staff member, because on-the-job training is conducted in the actual front-line place, and it provides maximum realism. Moreover, staff members receive immediate feedback. The trainer can correct problems immediately, since the training involves only one trainee (Kavanaugh and Ninemeier, 1991:94).

The feature of this type of training is that all trainees, who follow a lead trainer for a sufficient period of time, will be guided. On-the-job training ties up a trainer for a considerable amount of time with one or a few staff, and relies on the trainer to follow the job breakdowns to ensure that standard procedures are taught. Further, the training method is time-consuming and therefore may be unsuitable to many fast-paced hotel services.

On-the-job training is the most cost-effective method of skills training available. Staff are usually positive about this kind of training, because it is so specific to the needs of their work. Since learning occurs on-site, there is no difficulty in transferring learning to actual application. Structured on-the-job training is highly recommended as a primary method for ongoing training in the service quality of the front-line staff operation. Three effective on-the-job training methods (See Table 7.1) are discussed below.

#### **7.4.1.1 Role-playing**

Role-playing is a hands-on teaching method that gives trainees an opportunity to practise the skills of dealing with customers. It can also be interpreted in terms of putting staff into situations where they can test their behaviour and get feedback. Forrest (90:111) states that trainees have the opportunity to try various ways of communicating and interacting with people, then they analyse



why people act in a certain way and how the interactions depicted in the role play could be improved.

The purpose of the role-playing method is to give trainees a chance to experience such situations in a controlled setting. Consider the use of role-playing in a training session designed to teach trainees how to use interpersonal skills more effectively. A trainer might ask one trainee to play the role of a customer and another to play the role of a staff member. The purpose is to allow each trainee to experience what it "feels like" to be in that role (Woods, 1992:176). The instructions of role-playing should include character descriptions, so that all trainees are given some guidance as to the personality and attitude of the individuals they will depict. Role-playing is a helpful method for gaining understanding of another person's viewpoint. It works equally well when the objective is to see how one is perceived by others (Laird, 1985:156).

#### **7.4.1.2 Simulation**

Simulations are the duplication of service operations in a real-life situation, so that trainees can experience and manipulate the situation (Abella, 1986:148). Moreover, simulation can also be used in eliciting special techniques such as quantitative analysis, forecasting, employee election, aptitude and behaviour testing (Burgoyne and Stuart, 1991:30).

Behaviour can be learned through simulation of real service situations. During the training course, trainees can be asked to simulate or imitate the behaviour. For example, staff being trained in hotel reservations techniques can use training telephones to simulate taking reservations. Managers or experienced staff may play the roles of customers calling in to make reservations. Since they know what kinds of special requests customers make, they can simulate a wide variety of customer situations.

In the hotel restaurant, it is often a good idea to simulate the preparation and service of a complete meal. Managers or other staff can be invited as the "guests". Restaurant staff are instructed in all the skills and are told to treat the "guests" as they would treat regular guests. The "guests" can be invited to review and critique the experience with the staff in payment for their meal. Forrest (1990:116-117) emphasised that this type of training may seem costly, but it is extremely effective and usually will provide a good return on investment.

#### **7.4.1.3 Case studies**

According to Wood (1992:176), when case studies are used, trainees are asked to sort through the data provided in the case to identify the principal issues and then propose solutions to these issues. Case studies have been a popular way to get involvement and to bring discussion down to a reasonable level of concreteness (Laird, 1985:148). They contain information that trainees use to analyse what has occurred and what might have been prevented or changed. This method can be combined with several other forms of communication media, for example, video recordings, films and slide shows, all of which will assist in enhancing the authenticity of the case studies (Morgan, 1993:100).

The case study should provide enough detail so as to enable trainees to suggest possible ways of responding to the situation within the service standards. Meanwhile, the staff can get the opportunity to develop their analytical skills. Every situation that occurs within a service has the potential of becoming a training case. It depends very much on how it is handled by the trainer, how flexible he/she is, and how sensitive he/she is to the real needs of trainees. The role of the trainer in this approach is to encourage trainees to take positions, state their views, and confront one another when they disagree about elements of the solution (Verser, 1989:47).

### **7.4.2 Off-the-job Training**

Off-the-job training takes place in an environment other than the actual workplace. Various methods may be used, but the particular choice will depend on what is to be imparted. The following are three training methods (See Table 7.2) which are the most successful route to acquiring knowledge and skills, or to changing attitudes:

#### **7.4.2.1 Lecture method**

The lecture method is the most common form of off-the-job training. It is best used when information needs to be passed on to a large audience and for imparting knowledge, for example, hotel history and policies, legal matters, regulations, recipes and an outline of methods and procedures (Boella, 1987:108).

The lecture method can save time if it is to the point. It is the most frequently used teaching method and the most familiar to the trainees (Mitchell, 1987:168). It can also be used when specific information must be presented in a short amount of time to a large group of staff.

During the lecture, the limitation is that no allowance is made for the varying levels of understanding among trainees. It does not give the trainees the chance to practise what they have been taught. It is possible to record a lecture on audiotape or videotape for later reply and review.

#### **7.4.2.2 Conference method**

The conference method emphasises group discussion as a means of reaching agreement on statements or solutions (Verser, 1989:49). This method would



be particularly useful in the improvement of service quality, in that it may not necessarily involve the presentation of new information and concepts, but rather the sharing of ideas, solving problems common to a group, gaining acceptance of a new process, or increasing tolerance and understanding (Watson, 1979:169).

This method is also useful for the development of interpersonal skills, for example, understanding and communication. It is especially successful in changing attitudes and encouraging innovative thinking. Forrest (1990:107) believes that the method relies heavily on the concept of brainstorming, which is a process designed to generate as many ideas as possible about a designated situation or problem. It encourages all group members to participate in a free flow of ideas and to build on the ideas of others. The outcome of the conference method should be agreement on the solutions to a job-related problem, which will be applied when the participants return to the job setting.

#### **7.4.2.3 Panel discussions**

Panel discussions can be used to present several viewpoints on the same subject as a basis for debate. Each person can argue with another member of the panel or answer questions from the audience (Mitchell, 1987:170). Panels are useful for the presentation of ideas and plans, particularly when issues have to be clarified or expanded and the views of groups of people have to be ascertained. The panel leader requires skill in: planning, careful preparation, encouraging the involvement of individuals, controlling the debate, summarising the results of the discussion and ensuring that suitable action is taken (Robinson, 1985:108).

The above-mentioned methods of training are based on in-service training. There are also a wide variety of courses offered by Hospitality Industry Training

Board, Small Business Advisory Bureaus and the hotel schools at various Technikons. Professional advice on which particular way to follow can be sought from any of these institutions.

## **7.5 CONCLUSION**

Training plays a major role in the improvement of service quality. By defining training needs, a hotel should determine what specific knowledge, skills and attitudes must be developed and how to bring the staff's performance up to standard. The analysis of training needs can help managers clarify training objectives and justify the training investment.

The training plan must be linked with the service situations in which knowledge, skill and attitude will be used. It should be designed to enable all staff members to perform their service well and fully develop their capability.

Training methods are varied. Each method must be uniquely effective in producing results under different circumstances. It usually depends on the type of training intended, the trainees selected and the objectives of the training program. On-the-job training and off-the-job training are the main training methods in the hotel industry. Hotel managers should follow several guidelines to choose the best method for any particular training program.

**TABLE 7.1**  
**ON-THE-JOB TRAINING METHODS**

Method	Definition	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Role-Playing	Good for customer relations training. Trainees pretend to be selected people in specific situations and experiment with different approaches for dealing with people and with situations.	Trainees learn possible results of certain behaviour in a classroom situation; skills in dealing with people are practised; alternative approaches are analyzed and considered.	Much time is spent getting points across; trainers must be skilful and creative in helping the class learn from the situation; some employees resist role-playing
2. Simulations	Good for skill development. Trainees imitate actions required on the job (such as taking reservations, or the service of a meal).	Training becomes "real", trainees are actively involved in the learning process; training has direct applicability to jobs performance after training.	Simulations are time-consuming; they require a skilful and creative trainer.
3 Case study	The case study is a description of a real or imagined situation which contains information that trainees can use to analyze what has occurred and what might have been prevented or changed.	Presents a real-life situation which enables trainees to consider what they would do; used to teach a wide variety of skills in which application of information is important.	Realistic cases are difficult to write and time-consuming to discuss; the trainer must be creative and skilful in leading discussions, making points, and keeping trainees on the track.

**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM KAVANAUGH AND NINEMEIER (1991:93-94)**



**TABLE 7.2**  
**OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING METHOD**

Method	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Lecture	Least effective method. One person does all the talking; may use hand-outs; limited question/answer to supplement lecture	Least amount of trainer preparation; provides a lot of information quickly when retention of details is not important.	Does not actively involve trainees in training process; trainees forget much information when it is only presented orally.
2. Conference	Group approach to specific problem or issue and reaching agreement on statement or solution. Relies on brainstorming. Trainer is a facilitator rather than an instructor.	Deals with real problems from the job setting; much trainee participation; builds self-esteem, personal accountability, and commitment to performance standards.	Group may be hard to manage; group opinions generated at the conference may differ from manager's ideas; conflict can result.
3. Panel	Helps people discuss several points of view on the same subject. Moderator sees that discussion rules are followed. Panel members must agree on training objectives.	Interesting to hear different points of view; process invites employees' opinions; employees are challenged to consider alternative ways to achieve the same result.	Requires a great deal of preparation; method difficult to evaluate except by evaluating what happens when trainees apply what they have learned.

**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM KAVANAUGH AND NINEMEIER (1991:93-94)**

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY**

#### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

Service quality improvement is not a program, but a process that continues in a never-ending loop (Hinton and Schaeffer, 1994:238). In other words, customers will never be satisfied with the service that staff offer. Innovation is always required in all of the hotel's activities. According to Grocock (1986:374-375), hotel success is contingent upon the superiority of the service quality sold -- superiority compared to competing services. Such superiority can be achieved and maintained only by continuous, never-ending quality improvement. To achieve the improvement of service quality, the top management of the hotel must first establish continuous improvement as a policy in order to achieve three aims: people retention (such as, hotel staff); attracting and retaining customers; and profit improvement (Lockwood, *et al.* 1992:335).

#### **8.2 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ELEMENTS OF SERVICE QUALITY**

Oakland (1989:12-13) defines service quality improvement as "an approach to improving the effectiveness and flexibility of businesses as a whole. It is essentially a way of organising and involving the whole organisation: every department, every activity, and every single person at every level". A service process is seen as a series of links in a quality chain with each staff member acting as a helping hand to the next staff member until the service is finally delivered to the customer. All departments, all processes, all systems as well as all individual staff members in the hotel need to be involved in the improvement of service quality. Any single element of the chain that is not involved will cause quality problems that will eventually and finally affect the

customer. The following key elements of continuous improvement in service quality are important.

### **8.2.1 Focusing on the Customer**

It must be recognised that a customer focus is the first step towards continuous improvement. All staff members in the front-line departments need to know how their service affects or enhances the satisfaction of customers. Identifying the hotel's relationship with customers will help build trust, confidence, and loyalty. Continuous improvement of service quality includes not only the service attributes that meet basic customer requirements, it also includes those that enhance and differentiate services from competing offerings (Hinton and Schaeffer, 1994:248).

### **8.2.2 Top Management Commitment**

Top management commitment is a vital ingredient to maintaining continuous improvement of service quality. Managers must take part in the creation of strategies, systems and methods for achieving excellence. The setting, monitoring and adjustment of service quality goals are top management's primary task (Lockwood, et al. 1992:330).

Hotel managers must commit themselves to the growth and development of the entire work force and should encourage participation and creativity by all staff. Through regular personal involvement in visible activities, for example, planning, communications, review of hotel quality performance, and recognising the staff members for quality achievement, top managers serve as role models reinforcing the values and encouraging leadership in all levels of management.



### 8.2.3 Empowerment

Showalter and Mulholland (1992:85) explained that empowerment can be obtained when a firm entrusts decision-making authority to front-line staff in situations where such authority traditionally resided solely with management. According to Carr (1990:68), empowerment is to allow the front-line staff to handle moments of truth with great independence and a strong sense of personal responsibility. In the present competitive hotel situation, staff skills must be expanded to include not only the basic tasks, but also the problem-solving skills necessary to change the way in which the hotel services are performed. This enables staff members to respond to customers' demands. An effective way to empower the staff member is to provide jobs that allow the staff to exercise more discretion on the job. In other words, empower the staff.

Empowerment is not to just giving a mandate to the staff, but giving them the power or authority to act. To feel empowered, a number of preconditions must be in place (Showalter and Mulholland, 1992:85):

- A shared vision and a common set of values must exist company-wide.
- Individuals must be properly trained.
- Benefits must be fairly and equally distributed.
- Managers must have faith and confidence in their staff.
- The overall culture of the organisation must support risk-taking.

Empowerment has really shown that there is a huge reservoir of untapped potential in all staff members. It will lead to greater involvement, with everyone

correcting mistakes that have been made by others and making sure that customers will return.

#### **8.2.4 Staff Involvement**

Every staff member of the front-line departments in the hotel must be involved in service quality improvement. As Oakland (1993:433) pointed out, people are the source of ideas and innovation, and their expertise, experience, knowledge, and co-operation have to be harnessed to get those ideas implemented.

True staff involvement is created when every staff member is motivated to make changes that support the strategic needs of the hotel as a whole. According to Wilson (1991: 67-80), the correct approach in motivating staff involvement should be objective, relaxed, dynamic, flexible, and allow ample opportunities for creativity.

#### **8.2.5 Rewards and Recognition**

In the management of a hotel, the role of staff rewards and recognition is to improve the service quality, and support the achievement of the hotel's goals. Management must not see the staff as a commodity, but an important resource for the hotel. Therefore, financial incentive is not considered a strong motivating factor relative to the opportunity for staff to improve their work environment actively. However, a non-financial and non-material method of rewarding and recognising staff is a powerful motivator. Lockwood, et al. (1992:332) believed that there are hundreds of ways of giving rewards and recognition, and when it is done sincerely and genuinely, when it is based on customer feedback and improvement, it has greater impact and is better received than material rewards. George and Weimerskirch (1994:120-122) described day-to-day recognition as a main factor to continuous improvement.

The staff need more day-to-day, intangible recognition from their supervisors and managers, especially to satisfy some very basic human needs, for example, security, acceptance, self-respect, achievement, and appreciation.

### **8.3 EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Continuous improvement in service quality results from the persistent, concrete, day-to-day search to make every aspect of performance better (Kinlaw, 1992:41). Achieving the highest level of service quality requires a well-defined and well-executed approach to continuous improvement. A focus on improvement needs to be a part of all operations and all service unit activities of a hotel. Hinton and Schaeffer (1994:249-250) suggested five types of effective approaches:

- Enhancing value to customers through new and improved services.
- Reducing errors, defects, and wastage in the process of service.
- Improving responsiveness and cycle time performance.
- Improving productivity and effectiveness in the use of all resources.
- Improving the hotel's performance and leadership position in fulfilling its responsibilities.

Continuous improvement is driven not only by the objective to provide better service quality, but also by the need to be responsive and efficient. To meet these objectives, the effective approaches of continuous improvement must contain regular cycles of planning, execution, and evaluation. Ideally, the long-term effective approach of continuous improvement efforts will create a



renewed sense of competitive energy in the hotel industry (Showalter and Mulholland, 1992:83).

An effective approach of continuous improvement must be developed in order to achieve ongoing, never-ending improvement in the work processes. The following elements should be focused on or emphasised (Ebel, 1991:74-75):

- Improvement in the performance administration and management processes and in the service produced for customers.
- Support for structured teams (departmental co-operation for achieving ongoing process improvement).
- Identifying and meeting the customer's changing needs.
- Identifying strengths and weaknesses in competitors and other hotels, and using this knowledge in the pursuit of excellence.
- Enhancing the tools and skills used by the hotel.
- Improving the quality of life for all staff members within the hotel, the customers, the suppliers, and society as a whole.

## **8.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has considered the task of continuous improvement in service quality, and has proposed a way to aid in the identification of improvement elements and approaches to optimum effectiveness. The emphasis of the chapter is that all the managers and staff members should be involved in the improvement of service quality, and all the components of service operations must be taken into consideration to achieve this improvement.

## CHAPTER 9

### RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL STUDY

#### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

The overall goal of the study is to investigate the factors that influence the quality of service rendered by front-line staff in the Free State and Northern Cape hotels.

For this purpose a postal survey was completed, whereby a questionnaire (see Annexure B) was mailed to the managers of each of the fifty-six graded hotels in the Free State and Northern Cape identified from the address list obtained from SATOUR. The managers from twenty-nine graded hotels completed the questionnaires and mailed it back. The response rate was 51.78%.

A separate questionnaire (see Annexure D) was mailed to the front-line staff. The same address list that was used for the first questionnaire was also used for the second one. A convenience sample was drawn from the fifty-six graded hotels. Thirty questionnaires were mailed to front-line staff. Fifteen front-line staff members mailed back their questionnaires. The response rate was 50%.

The front-line staff are performing the following jobs or tasks in the hotel front-line positions:

- Reception;
- Guest service;
- Maintaining smooth operation;
- Reservation;
- Switchboard;
- Clerk;
- Books and banking; and
- Trainee.

The findings in connection with the quality of service rendered by front-line staff in the Free State and Northern Cape hotels are discussed under the following headings:

- Exposition of participants.
- General profile of participating hotels.
- Service quality performance of front-line staff.
- Service quality planning.
- Service quality measurement and control.
- Staff training in service quality.
- Continuous improvement of service quality.

## 9.2 Exposition of Participants

### 9.2.1 Actual Participants and Non-participants (managers)

Table 9.1 discloses a profile of the potential participants, actual participants and non-participants.

**Table 9.1 Actual participants and non-participants (managers)(1996)**

Star Grading	Potential participants		Actual participants		Non-participants	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
One-star	5	8,9	0	0	5	18,5
Two-star	35	62,5	19	65,5	16	59,3
Three-star	15	26,8	9	31,0	6	22,2
Four-star	1	1,8	1	3,5	0	0
Total	56	100	29	100	27	100

Table 9.1 shows that there are fifty-six potential participants, twenty-nine actual participants (51,8%) and twenty-seven non-participants (48,2%). Of the actual



participants in the survey, 65,5% of the hotels were two-star, 31% of the hotels were three-star and the remaining 3,5% were four-star.

### 9.2.2 Actual Participants and Non-participants (front-line staff)

Table 9.2 is a profile of the front-line staff; it is the potential participants, actual participants and non-participants.

**Table 9.2 Potential participants, actual participants and non-participants (front-line staff) (1996)**

Star Grading	Potential participants		Actual participants		Non-participants	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
One-star	0	0	0	0	0	0
Two-star	18	60	5	33.3	13	86.7
Three-star	10	33.3	8	53.4	2	13.3
Four-star	2	6.7	2	13.3	0	0
Total	30	100	15	100	15	100

Table 9.2 indicates that there are thirty potential participants, fifteen actual participants (50%) and fifteen non-participants (50%). Of the actual participants in the survey, 33.3% of the hotels were two-star, 53.4% of the hotels were three-star and the rest 13.3% were four-star.

### 9.3 GENERAL PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING HOTELS

This section will expose the general profile of the participating hotels, such as the form of ownership, hotels belonging to hotel chains, formal qualification of managers and front-line staff members, total number of employees and front-line staff members employed. Tables and figures reflect the present state of various graded hotels, and their managers, as well as staff members.

### 9.3.1 Forms of Ownership Assumed by Participating Hotels

Table 9.3 gives an indication of the forms of ownership assumed by the participating hotels.

**Table 9.3 Forms of ownership assumed by participating hotels (1996)**

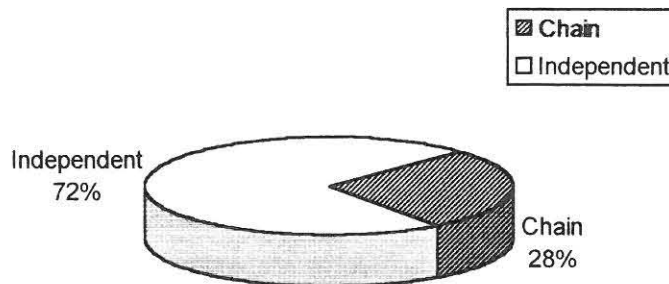
Form of ownership	Star Grading							
	Two		Three		Four		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sole proprietorship	2	10,5	2	22,2	1	100	5	17,3
Partnership	2	10,5	-	-	-	-	2	6,9
Close corporation	5	26,4	2	22,2	-	-	7	24,1
Private Co.	8	42,1	4	44,5	-	-	12	41,4
Public Co.	2	10,5	1	11,1	-	-	3	10,3
Total	19	100	9	100	1	100	29	100

According to table 9.3, the relationship between the various graded hotels and the forms of ownership of the hotels is reflected. Approximately 17,3% of the participating hotels are sole proprietorships; 6,9% are partnerships; 24,1% are close corporations; 41,4% are private companies, and 10,3% are public companies. Apparently a large number of two- and three- star hotels in the Free State and Northern Cape are private companies.

### 9.3.2 Hotels Belonging to Hotel Chains

The percentage hotels belonging to hotel chains as well as the independent hotels are indicated in Figure 9.1.

**Figure 9.1 Hotels belonging to hotel chains (1996)**



Of all the participants involved in the survey, only eight hotels (28%) belong to hotel chains, while twenty-one hotels (72%) are individually owned (see Figure 9.1). The present state of the hotel industry in terms of the number and forms of ownership assumed by the various hotels in the survey, bears evidence of the fact that about two thirds of hotels in Free State and Northern Cape are small independent hotels.

### 9.3.3 Hotel Chains Represented in the Survey

Table 9.4 gives an indication of the hotel chains represented in the survey.

**Table 9.4 Hotel chains represented in the survey (1996)**

Star Grading	Hotel Chain											
	Southern Sun		Protea Hotels		City Lodge		Aventura Resort		Hartman		YSSEL Hotels	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Two-star	-	-	1	100	1	100	-	-	1	100	-	-
Three-star	3	100	-	-	-	-	1	100	-	-	-	-
Four-star	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	100
Total	3		1		1		1		1		1	



The hotel chains that are represented are reflected in table 9.4. They include Southern Sun Hotels, Protea Hotels, City Lodges, Aventura Resorts, Hartman and YSSEL Hotels. Southern Sun had three hotels in the survey, and each of the other chains had one hotel.

### 9.3.4 Formal Qualifications of Owners/Managers in Participating Hotels

The formal qualifications of owners/managers in the participating hotels are reflected in Table 9.5.

**Table 9.5 Formal qualifications of owners/managers in participating hotels (managers survey) (1996)**

Star Grading	Formal Qualifications							
	Std.8		Std.10		Diploma/ Degree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Two-star	3	100	7	63,6	9	60	19	65,5
Three-star	-	-	4	36,4	5	33,3	9	31,0
Four-star	-	-	-	-	1	6,7	1	3,5
Total	3	10,4	11	37,9	15	57,7	29	100

Table 9.5 reflected that 57,7% of managers have diplomas/degrees; 37,9% have Std.10 and 10,4% have Std.8.

### 9.3.5 Formal Qualifications of the Front-line Staff in Participating Hotels

Table 9.6 gives an indication of the formal qualifications of the front-line staff in the participating hotels.

**Table 9.6 Formal qualifications of the front-line staff in participating hotels (front-line staff survey) (1996)**

Star Grading	Formal Qualification							
	Std.8		Std.10		Diploma/ Degree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Two-star	-	-	3	33,3	2	40	5	33,3
Three-star	1	100	6	66,7	1	20	8	53,4
Four-star	-	-	-	-	2	40	2	13,3
Total	1	6,7	9	60	5	33,3	15	100

Table 9.6 indicated that 33,3% of the front-line staff have diplomas/degrees; 60% have Std.10 and 6,7% have Std.8.

The above two tables reflected a profile of formal qualification of managers and front-line staff in the participating hotels. Comparing table 9.5 and 9.6, the number of managers having diplomas/degrees is higher (57,7%) than the numbers of front-line staff (33,3%) with similar qualifications. The surprising result is that the percentage of those managers with a Std.8 qualification is 10,4%, while the front-line staff with a similar qualification is only 6,7%.

### **9.3.6 Number of Employees Employed According to Star Grading**

The number of employees employed according to star grading, in the participating hotels, are reflected in Figure 9.2.

**Figure 9.2 Number of employees employed according to star grading (1996)**

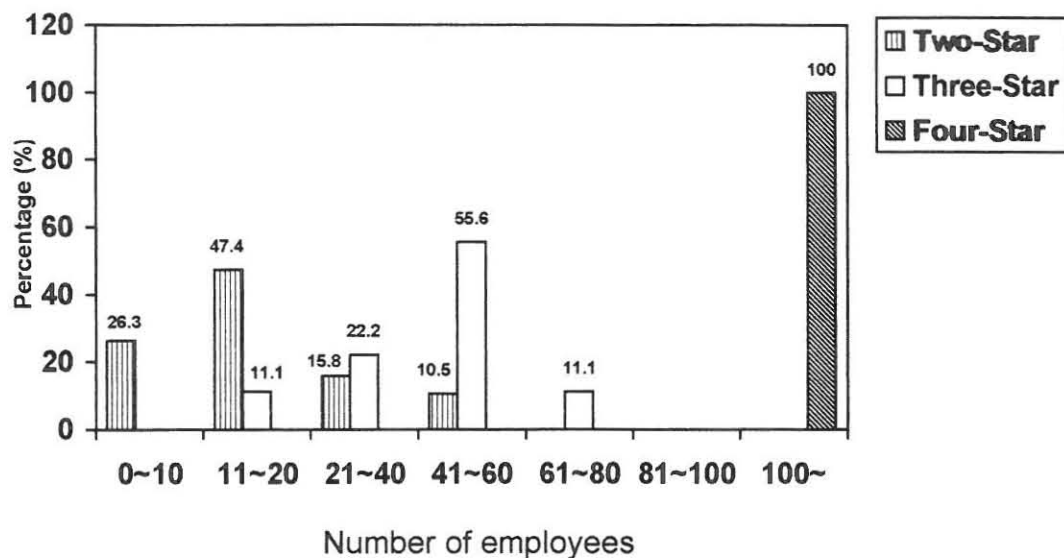


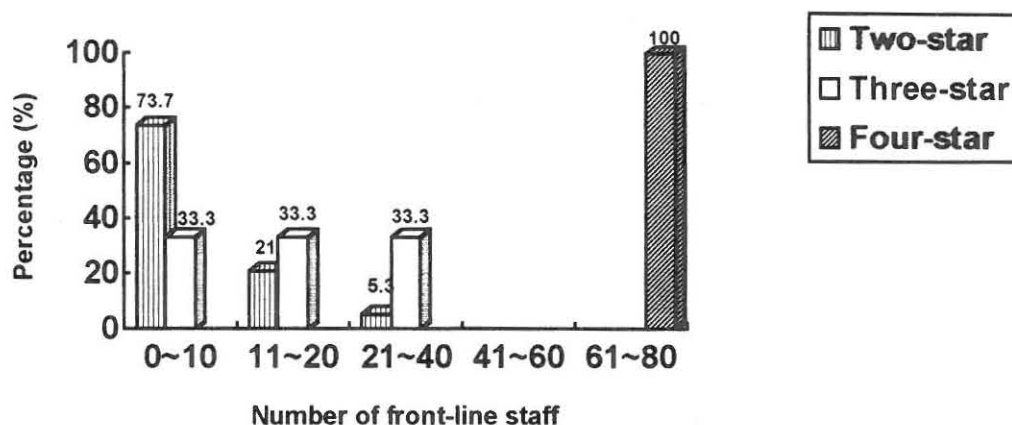
Figure 9.2 indicates that the majority two star hotels (47,4%) have between eleven and twenty employees respectively. Only two of the two star hotels (10,5%) were recorded as having between forty one and sixty employees. In contrast more than half the three star hotels (55,6%) reported having between forty one and sixty employees, while only one (11,1%) of the three star hotels had between eleven and twenty persons in their employ. One four star hotel (100%) indicated the highest employment figure (i.e. over one hundred employees).

### **9.3.7 Number of Front-line Staff Members Employed According to Star Grading**

Figure 9.3 reveals the number of front-line staff employed in the participating hotels.



**Figure 9.3 Number of front-line staff members employed according to star grading (1996)**



It is quite clear that most of the two-star hotels (73,7%) employ between zero and ten front-line staff. Only one two star hotel (5,3%) indicated employing between twenty-one and forty staff members. All the participating three-star hotels employ between zero and forty front-line staff members. The four-star hotel (100%) employ among sixty-one and eighty front-line staff members

### 9.3.8 Comparative Percentage between Front-line Staff and Total Hotel Employees

The comparative percentages between front-line staff and the total number of employees are given in Table 9.7.

**Table 9.7 Comparative percentage between front-line staff and total hotel employees (1996)**

Front-line staff as a percentage of total hotel staff	Two-star(%)*	Three-star(%)*
0-20	34	33
21-40	78	10
41-60	10	34
61-80	0	11
81-100	0	11

\* The percentages in this column are shown as a percentage of the participating hotels. The response data for four-star hotel is meaningless, so that is not listed in the table.

According to the survey, the number of front-line staff in terms of the percentage of the total hotel employees varies. From table 9.7, one find that 78% of two-star hotels indicate that front-line staff make up 21% to 40% of the total hotel employees, while 34% of three-star hotels account for 41% to 60% and 11% account for 81% to 100% of the total hotel employees. A four-star hotel reveals that front-line staff amount to 70% of the total of the hotel employees. A noteworthy result is that front-line staff will account for a high percentage of the total hotel staff as the grading of the hotel increases.

#### **9.4 SERVICE QUALITY PERFORMANCE OF FRONT-LINE STAFF**

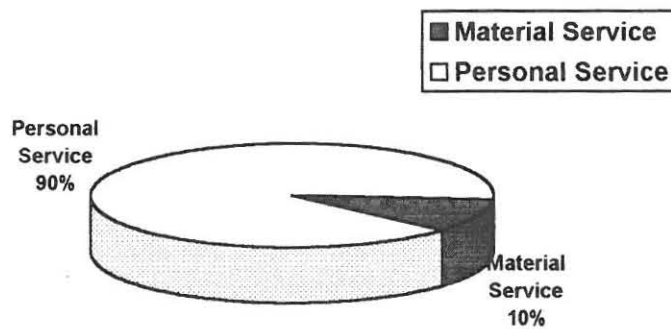
Customers evaluate service quality through their perceptions of the service performance. In order to obtain the actual profile of the front-line staff's performance, a number of relevant aspects need to be taken into account:

- The importance of personal service
- The main components of service quality in front-line position
- An outline of the major front-line functional department
- Front-line staff's behaviour towards customers
- The importance of knowledge and skills in service performance
- Characteristics of the personnel capability
- Influences that affect staff performance

#### 9.4.1 Most Important Services in Participating Hotels

Figure 9.4 gives an indication of the most important services in the participating hotels from a managerial viewpoint.

**Figure 9.4 Most important services in participating hotels (managerial point of view) (1996)**



Material service and personal service (see Annexure B, question 10) are two factors in servicing customers. The former one relates to tangible aspects, such as product quality, service environment and the delivery system. The latter one involves a human interface between customers and front-line staff. It encompasses skill and ability, service attitude, accuracy and, ultimately, a personal capability. The vast majority of participating hotels (90%) indicated that personal service is the most important aspect in the hotel industry.



#### 9.4.2 Important Service Quality Factors Viewed by Managers in the Participating Hotels

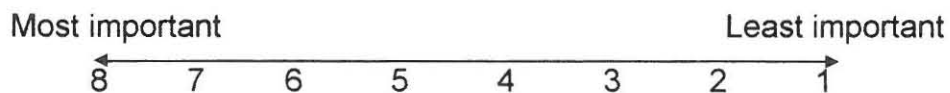
The important service quality factors viewed by the managers in the participating hotels are reflected in Table 9.8.

**Table 9.8 Important service quality factors viewed by managers in the participating hotels (1996)\***

Service quality factor	Result**	Ranking
Attitude towards the customer	7,4	1
Understanding the customer	5,3	2
Communication	5,1	3
Reliability (dependability)	5,0	4
Staff knowledge and skills	4,9	5
Hotel credibility	3,3	6
Security and safety	3,1	7
Tangible facilities	2,0	8

\* The results in table 9.8 are an average out of eight. Seven comma four indicates that the factor "attitude towards the customer" has got a rating of 7,4 out of eight. Two indicates that the factor "tangible facilities" got a rating of 2 out of eight. The same calculation is applicable to table 9.9, 9.13, 9.14, 9.15, 9.16, 9.19, 9.29, 9.32, 9.33 and 9.34.

\*\* Basis: Eight-point rating scale



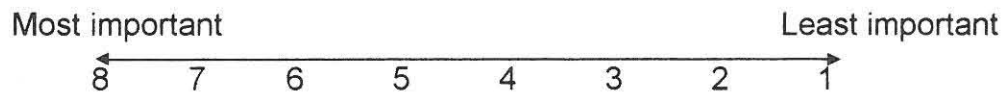
#### 9.4.3 Important Service Quality Factors Viewed by Front-line Staff in the Participating Hotels

The important service quality factors according to the front-line staff in the participating hotels are given in Table 9.9.

**Table 9.9 Important service quality factors viewed by front-line staff in the participating hotels (1996)**

Service quality factor	Result*	Ranking
The attitude towards customers	6,9	1
Communication	5,8	2
Understanding the customer	5,7	3
Staff knowledge & skills	5,6	4
Reliability (dependability)	4,5	5
Security & safety	3,2	6
Hotel credibility	2,6	7
Tangible facilities	1,8	8

\* Basis: Eight-point rating scale



The conclusion that can be made from table 9.8 and 9.9 is that a positive **attitude towards the customer** is essential. Managers indicated a rating of 7,4 out of eight, while the front-line staff resulted in 6,9. However, **tangible facilities** were ranked only eighth by both managers and front-line staff, which again proved that the material services are the least important as seen by the customer (See par. 4.4.1.3). There are slightly different ranking views between managers and front-line staff regarding other aspects. For example, managers ranked **staff knowledge and skill's** fifth, while front-line staff ranked **staff knowledge and skill's** fourth.

#### **9.4.4 Quality of Service Offered by Front-line Departments as Viewed by Managers**

Table 9.10 gives an indication of the quality of service offered by front-line departments as viewed by the managers in the participating hotels.

**Table 9.10 Quality of service offered by front-line departments as viewed by managers (1996)**

Department	Quality of service							
	Low*		Average		High		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N**	%
Reception/Information	-	-	3	10,7	25	89,3	28	100
Reservation	-	-	4	13,8	25	86,2	29	100
Cashier	1	3,5	8	27,6	20	68,9	29	100
Door-man	6	42,8	4	28,6	4	28,6	14	100
Food production	1	3,6	6	21,4	21	75,0	28	100
Dining-Room	1	3,5	7	24,1	21	72,4	29	100
Banquet/Function Room	1	4,2	9	37,5	14	58,3	24	100

\* The low, average and high in quality of service were listed in five levels of service quality in Annexure B, Question 13. In order to obtain the worthiest results from the survey, three levels have been used. Very low and low are considered as low, high and very high are considered as high.

\*\* The numbers in this column do not correspond to the participating hotels (N= 29). The reason is that some hotels do not have certain functional departments, such as doorman and banquet / function room.

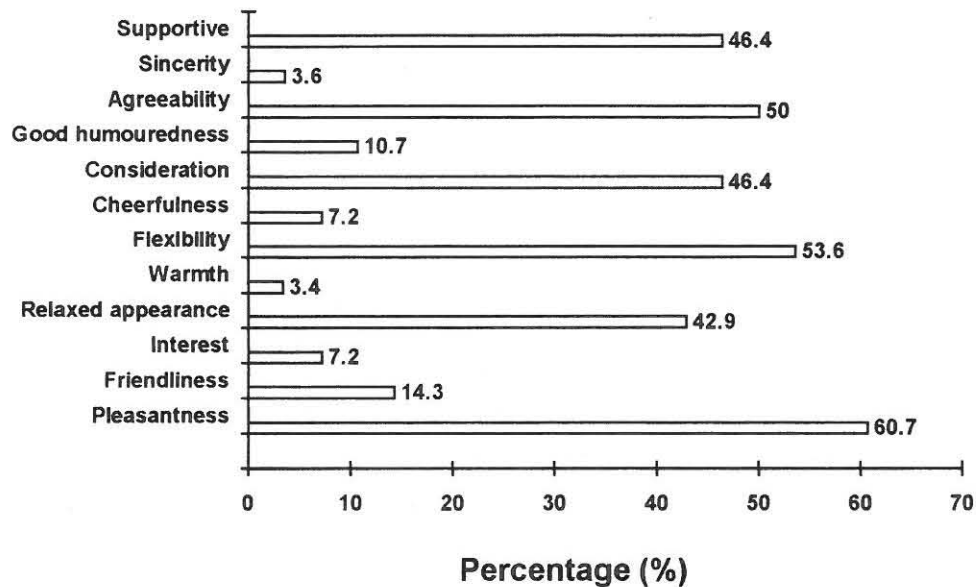
From table 9.10, **reception / information** and **reservation** are the two major front-line functional departments. **Reception / information** can be seen as the first contact with customers. The service quality in this department is the initial contact and is crucial. Eighty-nine comma three percent of participating hotels indicated that the quality of service in the reception/information department is high, the second highest is the reservation department. Due to the new grading scheme, a large number of hotels have been degraded as budget hotels or selected service hotels. Hence, one can find that some functional departments, such as **doorman** and **banquet/function room**, were indicated at a very low percentage rate.



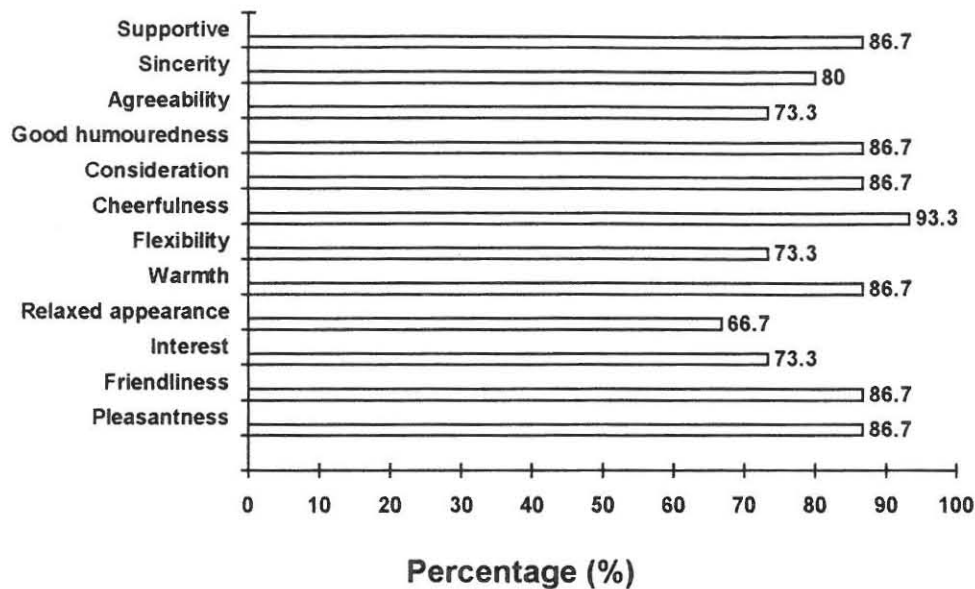
#### 9.4.5 Front-line Staff's Behaviour towards Customers Viewed by Managers in Participating Hotels

Figure 9.5 shows the front-line staff's behaviour towards customers as viewed by the managers. The front-line staff's viewpoints are reflected in Figure 9.6.

**Figure 9.5 Front-line staff's behaviour towards customers viewed by managers in participating hotels (1996)**



**Figure 9.6 Front-line staff's behaviour towards customers viewed by front-line staff themselves in participating hotels (1996)**



Annexure B, Question 14, and Annexure D, Question 7, listed a number of ratings in characterising the behaviour of front-line staff towards customers to see the percentages of their experiences regarding personal execution on different behaviours. Figure 9.5 and 9.6 include all the positive aspects of behaviours of the front-line staff towards customers. Comparing the two figures, one find that the percentages the front-line staff indicated are generally higher than those viewed by managers. Figure 9.5 revealed that **pleasantness** (60,7%) is the most important behavioural factor, while only 3,4% of participants reflected **warmth**. Figure 9.6 shown that **cheerfulness** (93,3%) is the most important behavioural factor shown towards customers. Meanwhile, 66,7% of front-line staff indicated that a **relaxed appearance** rating the lowest. It is interesting to note that managers rated **warmth** considerably lower (3,4%) than that of the front-line staff (86,7%). **Cheerfulness** reflected by front-line staff is rated the highest (93,3%), while managers rated it at only 7,2%.

#### 9.4.6 The Extent of Staff Knowledge and Skills in Participating Hotels

The extent of staff knowledge and skills of front-line staff as viewed by managers are indicated in Table 9.11. The front-line staff's viewpoints are reflected in Table 9.12.

**Table 9.11 The extent of staff knowledge and skills in participating hotels as viewed by managers (1996)**

Knowledge and skills	Low		Average		High		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Technical knowledge	3	10,3	12	41,4	14	48,3	29	100
Tangible product knowledge	4	13,8	15	51,7	10	34,5	29	100
Knowledge of hotel business	3	10,7	13	46,4	12	42,9	28	100
Knowledge of support personnel	4	14,2	12	42,9	12	42,9	28	100
Customer handling skills	3	10,3	8	27,6	18	62,1	29	100
Dealing with complaints	4	13,8	5	17,2	20	69,0	29	100
Understanding the capability of hotel	4	13,8	7	24,1	18	62,1	29	100
Experience of operational practices	6	20,7	9	31,0	14	48,3	29	100

**Table 9.12 The extent of knowledge and skills of front-line staff as viewed by front-line staff (1996)**

Knowledge and skills	Low		Average		High		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Technical knowledge	5	33,3	1	6,7	9	60	15	100
Tangible product knowledge	12	80	3	20	0	0	15	100
Knowledge of hotel business	2	13,3	4	26,7	9	60	15	100
Knowledge of support personnel	2	13,3	5	33,3	8	53,4	15	100
Customer handling skills	2	13,3	5	33,3	8	53,4	15	100
Dealing with complaints	6	40	1	6,7	8	53,4	15	100
Understanding the capability of hotel	7	46,7	5	33,3	3	20	15	100
Experience of operational practices	9	60	6	40	0	0	15	100

Table 9.11 and 9.12 revealed that the viewpoints of the extent of knowledge and skills given by managers and front-line staff vary. From table 9.11, one can see that the highest percentage rate (69%) is **dealing with complaints**,



while table 9.12 indicates **technical knowledge** and **knowledge of hotel business** as being the two highest percentages rates (60%). It is clearly evident that managers usually place emphasis on practical handling skills, while front-line staff care about their basic knowledge. Another noteworthy result deducted from table 9.12 is that 80% of participating front-line staff indicated that **tangible product knowledge** is low, which again reflects that intangible services are more important than tangible products. A more detailed exposition of knowledge and skills can be seen in par 4.4.1.1.

#### 9.4.7 Characteristics of Front-line Staff in Participating Hotels

Table 9.13 and 9.14 give an indication of the characteristics of front-line staff in the participating hotels. Table 9.13 is the viewpoint of the managers and Table 9.14 is the viewpoint of the front-line staff.

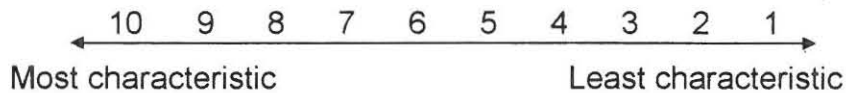
**Table 9.13 Characteristics of the staff viewed by managers (1996)**

Staff characteristic	Result*	Ranking
Desire to tackle difficult situations	6,8	1
Ability to handle stress	6,5	2
Be alert	6,3	3
Acceptance of challenges	5,5	4
Desire to learn	5,3	5
Ability to learn	5,2	6
Be accurate	5,1	7
Coolness under pressure	4,9	8
Ability to adjust to new situations	4,8	9
Ability to follow instructions	4,4	10

**Table 9.14 Characteristics of the staff viewed by front-line staff members (1996)**

Staff characteristic	Result*	Ranking
Be accurate	7,9	1
Ability to handle stress	6,5	2
Desire to learn	6,2	3
Coolness under pressure	6,1	4
Ability to follow instructions	6,0	5
Be alert	5,3	6
Ability to adjust to new situations	4,9	7
Ability to learn	4,9	7
Acceptance of challenges	3,7	8
Desire to tackle difficult situations	3,6	9

\* Basis: Ten-point rating scale



There was a visible difference in the responses of managers and other staff. Table 9.13 reflected that the factor of **desire to tackle difficult situations** ranked first. Contrary to this, in table 9.14, this factor ranks last. The front-line staff indicated the factor of **being accurate** as their first ranking. The perception therefore seems to be similar to the result obtained from the discussion in table 9.11 and 9.12, which reflected that managers prefer their front-line staff to **tackle difficult situations**, while front-line staff themselves care for the basic characteristic, such as, **accuracy**. It is interesting to find that both managers and front-line staff indicated that the **ability to handle stress** is the second most important characteristic.

#### **9.4.8 Aspects That Influence Staff Performance in Participating Hotels**

Table 9.15 reflects the manager's viewpoints and Table 9.16 reflects the front-line staff's viewpoints on the aspects that influence staff performance.

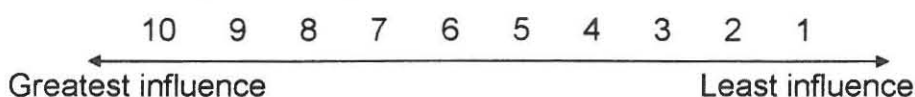
**Table 9.15 Aspects that influence staff performance in participating hotels (managerial point of view) (1996)**

Influential aspects	Result*	Ranking
Promoting to a higher position	7,0	1
Using money as a reward	6,2	2
Letting staff participate in decision making	5,4	3
Training and developing the staff	5,2	4
Management personal care towards staff members	5,0	5
Being a member of a cohesive team	4,6	6
Helping staff to become aware of their goals	4,5	7
Keeping staff informed on how well they performed	4,2	8
Letting staff know where he/she fits in best	3,8	9

**Table 9.16 Aspects that influence staff performance in participating hotels (staff point of view) (1996)**

Influential aspects	Result*	Ranking
Helping staff to become aware of their goals	6,4	1
Letting staff know where he/she fits in best	6,2	2
Training and developing the staff	6,0	3
Management personal care towards staff members	5,6	4
Keeping staff informed on how well they performed	5,5	5
Letting staff participate in decision making	5,3	6
Being a member of a cohesive team	4,9	7
Promoting to a higher position	4,7	8
Using money as a reward	1,3	9

\* Basis: Ten-point rating scale



According to table 9.15 and 9.16, the influential aspects indicated by managers and front-line staff show a big difference of opinion. The factor of **promoting to a higher position** in table 9.15 ranked first amongst the managers, while this factor reflected in table 9.16 ranked eighth amongst front-line staff. Nevertheless, the aspect of **using money as a reward** in table 9.16 is ranked



last, while this aspect indicated in table 9.15 is ranked second. However, a result can be found in that the preference of the front-line staff is not **promotion to a high position or using money as a reward**, but rather in **helping staff to become aware of their goals**.

## 9.5 SERVICE QUALITY PLANNING

As was discussed in paragraph 5.1, without a well-designed plan, service quality will not be effective. The plan should include the process that suits the needs of the individual staff member, and the co-ordination between departments and service performance standards.

### 9.5.1 Participating Hotels That Have a Service Quality Plan

The percentages of hotels that have and have not a service quality plan are indicated in Figure 9.7.

**Figure 9.7 Participating hotels that have a service quality plan (1996)**

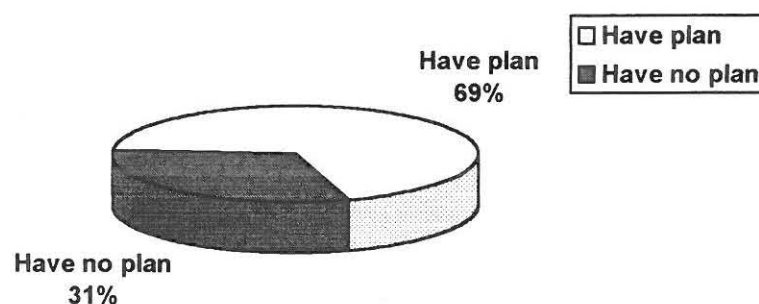


Figure 9.7 clearly shows the extent of service quality plan is designed in participating hotels. Of all the participants involved in the survey, twenty hotels (69%) have a service quality plan and nine hotels (31%) have no plan. The result of the survey also indicated that there are 90% of three- and four-star

hotels, and 55% of two-star hotels that have a service quality plan. Furthermore, 87,5% of hotels that belong to hotel chains have a service quality plan.

### 9.5.2 Processes Used by the Participating Hotels in Service Quality Planning

The processes indicated by the managers that are used in service quality planning are reflected in Table 9.17.

**Table 9.17 Processes used by the participating hotels in service quality planning (managerial point of view) (1996)**

Process	Result(%) *	Ranking
Analysing the service situation	80	1
Collecting data	70	2
Developing objectives	70	2
Implementing the plan	65	3

- This column shows that 80% of participating hotels, which have a service quality plan, have indicated **processes**.

From table 9.17, one can find that the majority (80%) of the participating hotels indicated that analysing the service situation is the most important step to design the service quality plan, while implementation has been neglected. Practically, a well designed plan without implementation will be useless. It means that a service quality plan must be well designed and well implemented.

### 9.5.3 Reasons for not Having a Service Quality Plan

The managers' reasons for not having a service quality plan are indicated in Table 9.18.

**Table 9.18 Reasons for not having a service quality plan (managerial point of view) (1996)**

Reason	N	%	Ranking
No need, hotel is too small	3	33,4	1
Expense	2	22,2	2
No time	2	22,2	2
Guided by customer response	2	22,2	2

The most frequent reason offered by the participants for not having a plan is that the hotel is too small, and therefore there is no need for a plan. The ranking numbers of the reasons **expense**, **no time**, and **guided by customer response** are the same (see Annexure B, Question 21).

#### 9.5.4 The Requirements for Service Performance Standards

The requirements for service performance standards, as seen by the managers, are indicated in Table 9.19.

**Table 9.19 The requirements for service performance standards (managerial point of view) (1996) \***

Requirements of standards	Result	Ranking
Certain kinds of standards must have a time limit set for achievement	4,8	1
The statement must be specific, clear, complete and accurate	4,2	2
The standard of performance must be measurable or observable	4,2	2
The standard must be attainable	4,1	3
The standard must conform to hotel policies, goals and applicable legal constraints	4,0	4

\* Basis: Five-point rating scale

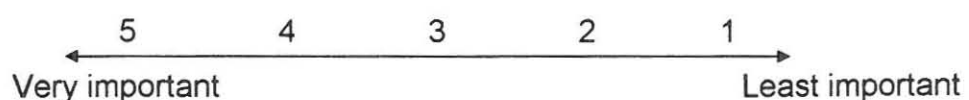




Table 9.19 revealed that “**certain kinds of standards must have a time limit set for achievement**” is the most important requirement for service performance standards, while the remaining four requirements are rated almost the same. It is worth noting that most participating hotels have set up service performance standards, but no time limit to achieve it. Therefore, it makes the standard unobtainable.

## **9.6 SERVICE QUALITY MEASUREMENT AND CONTROL**

Customers’ perceptions are determined by their expectation before the service is provided and how well the service actually meets these expectations. To maintain customer satisfaction in a hotel, the survey identified certain items and techniques. Customer complaints can provide the information about perceived and actual problems, which means that obtaining customer complaints is a learning opportunity.

### **9.6.1 Items That are Utilised in the Assessment of Customer Satisfaction in Participating Hotels**

Table 9.20 indicates the Items that are utilised in the assessment of customer satisfaction from a managerial point of view.

**Table 9.20 Items that are utilised in the assessment of customer satisfaction in participating hotels (managerial point of view) (1996)**

Item	N	% *	Rank- ing
Cleanliness	28	96,6	1
Value for money	25	86,2	2
Comfort	24	82,8	3
Fast response	23	79,3	4
Pleasantness	22	75,9	5
Provision of reasonable facilities	21	72,4	6
Efficiency	21	72,4	6
Politeness	21	72,4	6
Availability	19	65,5	7
Convenience	18	62,1	8
Safety	17	58,6	9
Relaxation	16	55,2	10
Privacy	15	51,7	11
Quite	13	44,8	12
Spacious	8	27,6	13
Smooth running	7	24,1	14
Total	298**	-	-

\* The percentages in this column are expressed as a percentage of the total number of respondents (N=29).

\*\* This total is larger than the number of respondents (N=29). Respondents could have selected more than one item (see Annexure B, Question 23).

Table 9.20 listed sixteen items for assessing customer satisfaction. It is clear that **cleanliness** (96,6%), **value for money** (86,2%) and **comfort** (82,8%) are the key elements in measuring service quality in participating hotels. Provision of reasonable facilities is ranked number 6. It reflects that the first five items are all intangible.

### 9.6.2 Participating Hotels That Have an Assessment System for Service Quality

Figure 9.8 gives an indication of the hotels that have and have not an assessment system for service quality.

**Figure 9.8 Participating hotels that have an assessment system for service quality (1996)**

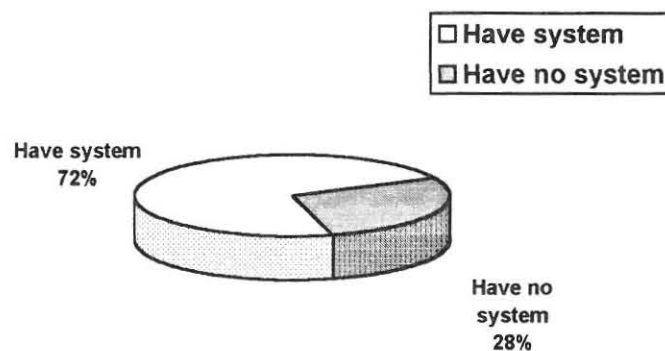


Figure 9.8 reflected that 72% of the respondents in the survey have an assessment system for service quality. Only 28 % have no system. As was discussed in par 6.4, the assessment of service quality is an important factor to appraise the actual service quality in order to improve it.

### 9.6.3 The Techniques Used in Participating Hotels for Assessing the Service Quality

Table 9.21 reflects the techniques used by managers to assess service quality.



**Table 9.21 The techniques used in participating hotels for assessing the service quality (managerial point of view) (1996)**

Technique	No	%	Ranking
Housekeeping/restaurant cleanliness check-list	18	62,1	1
Customer comment form	15	51,7	2
Quality control check-list	13	44,8	3
Service performance evaluation	12	41,4	4
Random inspection *	1	3,5	5
Questioning customer *	1	3,5	5

\* This was indicated as **other** in Annexure B, question 25.

As discussed in par 6.4, service quality assessment is a way of appraising various types of information and data that make up the major resources to assess the actual service quality. Table 9.21 reveals that 62,1% of participating hotels indicated **housekeeping / restaurant cleanliness check-list** as the main technique to assess the service quality. It reflects that hoteliers are used to emphasising their routine work, such as cleanliness, and do not pay enough attention to the service quality that concerns customers.

#### 9.6.4 Complaints Received Per Month in Participating Hotels

Table 9.22 shows the complaints received per month in the participating hotels.

**Table 9.22 Complaints received per month in participating hotels (1996)**

No. of complaints/month.	Frequency	
	N	%
0 - 5	24	82,8
6 - 10	5	17,2
Total	29	100

Paragraph 6.6 indicates that most customers generally do not complain. According to table 9.22, 82,8% of the participating hotels have only between zero and five complaints in a month, while 17,2% of the participants have between six and ten complaints.

#### 9.6.5 Inviting Complaints as a Learning Opportunity

The managers' viewpoints on the inviting of complaints as a learning opportunity are reflected in Figure 9.9.

**Figure 9.9 Inviting complaints as a learning opportunity (managerial point of view) (1996)**

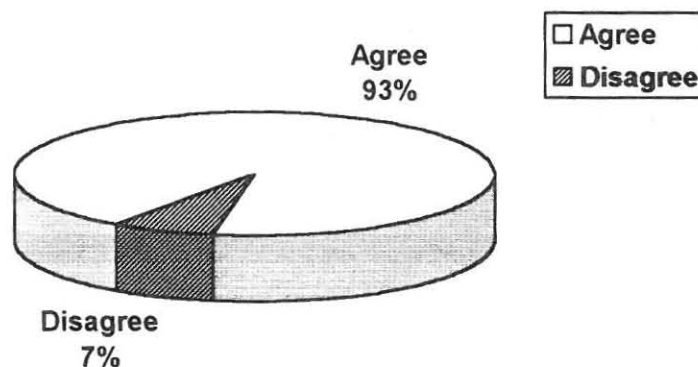


Figure 9.9 reflects that 93% of the respondents in the survey agree with the fact that inviting complaints is a learning opportunity. Only 7% disagree with this statement. According to table 9.21, more than half of the participating hotels have customer comment forms that can be found easily at reception, restaurant and guestrooms. It is evident that hotels are willing to invite customer complaints in order to improve the service quality.

## 9.7 STAFF TRAINING IN SERVICE QUALITY

As discussed in par 7.1, staff training in front-line departments can be the key to maintain an optimal level of performance in a hotel. It is a fact that training can provide major benefits in improving service quality through increasing knowledge skills and attitude. The following points which aimed at obtaining (1) indicators of the need for staff training; (2) the main training methods that hotels frequently used; (3) service quality improvement caused by effective training; and (4) the reasons for having no training plan.

### 9.7.1 Indicators of the Need for Training in Participating Hotels

Table 9.23 shows the indicators of the need for training as seen by the managers in the participating hotels.

**Table 9.23 Indicators of the need for training in participating hotels (managerial point of view) (1996)**

Indicator	N	%	Ranking
Customer dissatisfaction	28	96,6*	1
Disorganisation and confusion	22	75,9	2
Low efficiency	22	75,9	2
Low morale	17	58,6	3
Low sales	14	48,3	4
Sanitation problems	7	20,7	5
Total	110**	-	-

\* The percentages in this column are shown as a percentage of the total number of respondents (N=29).

\*\* The total number is larger than the number of respondents (N=29). In other words, respondents could have selected more than one item (see Annexure B, Question 28).

The majority of the participants (96,6%) indicated that **customer dissatisfaction** is the main indicator showing that training is needed.



### 9.7.2 Participating Hotels with a Training Plan

Table 9.24 indicates the hotels with a training plan.

**Table 9.24 Participating hotels with training plan (1996)**

Have a training plan	Star Grading							
	Two-star		Three-star		Four-star		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	8	42,1	7	77,8	1	100	16	55,2
No	11	57,9	2	22,2	-	-	13	44,8
Total	19	100	9	100	1	100	29	100

From the results of table 9.24, it appears that 57,9% of the two-star hotels and 22,2% of the three-star hotels have no training plan, while 42,1% of the two-star hotels, 77,8% of three-star hotels and 100% of four-star hotel have a training plan. It is clearly evident that the higher the grading of a hotel, the more emphasis they will put on an effective training plan for the staff to keep their high level of service quality.

### 9.7.3 Training Methods Listed by Managers and Front-line Staff

Table 9.25 shows the training methods listed by managers and Table 9.26 shows the training methods listed by front-line staff.

**Table 9.25 Training methods listed by managers (1996)**

Training method	N	%	Ranking
On the job training	8	50,0*	1
Demonstration	3	18,8	2
Lecture	3	18,8	2
Videos	3	18,8	2
Role playing	3	18,8	2
Discussion	2	12,5	3
Cross training	2	12,5	3
Sending on courses	2	12,5	3
Total	26**	-	-

\* The percentages in this column are shown as a percentage of the total number indicated **Yes** in Annexure B, Question 29. (N=16).

\*\* This total number is larger than the number of answering **Yes** in Annexure B, Question 29 (N=16), because the respondents could have selected more than one training method.

**Table 9.26 Training methods listed by front-line staff (1996)\***

Training method	Result	Ranking
On the job training	8,7	1
Sending on courses	6,3	2
Demonstration	6,1	3
Lecture	5,6	4
Cross training	4,9	5
Role playing	3,8	6
Discussion	3,4	7
Video	3,0	8

\* Basis: Nine-point rating scale

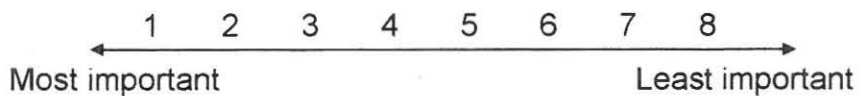


Table 9.25 and 9.26 clearly show the training methods which participating managers and their front-line staff are implementing. Hotel managers and front-line staff all indicated that **on-the-job training** is ranked first and has become common acceptance in staff training. Because it is a form of individualised learning, the trainer can design and pace the training to fit the needs of each staff member, and it is conducted in the actual front-line place. Moreover, staff members receive immediate feedback (see par 7.4.1). Another important factor can be seen in table 9.26, that the method of **sending on courses** is ranked second, while the same method in table 9.25 is only ranked last. It would appear that front-line staff need more formal training courses to improve their knowledge and skills.

#### 9.7.4 Front-line Staff That Have Undergone Training During 1995-1996

Table 9.27 reflects the managers' viewpoints regarding the number of staff that have undergone training. Table 9.28 is the viewpoints of the front-line staff.

**Table 9.27 Front-line staff that have undergone training during 1995-1996\***

Percentage of the staff that have undergone training	Frequency	
	N	%
0	11	38
1-10	0	0
11-20	0	0
21-30	1	3,4
31-40	1	3,4
41-50	2	6,9
51-60	1	3,4
61-70	0	0
71-80	3	10,4
81-90	1	3,4
91-100	9	31,1
Total	29	100

\* This was completed by hotel managers.

**Table 9.28 Front-line staff that have undergone training during 1995-1996\***

Percentage of the staff that have undergone training	Frequency	
	N	%
0	5	33,4
1-10	2	13,3
11-20	0	0
21-30	2	13,3
31-40	2	13,3
41-50	1	6,7
51-60	0	0
61-70	0	0
71-80	2	13,3
81-90	0	0
91-100	1	6,7
Total	15	100

\* This was completed by the front-line staff members.



Table 9.27 and 9.28 reflected the percentage of the staff that have undergone training during 1995-1996. A high percentage of managers (38%) and of front-line staff members (33,4%) indicated that no staff members had undergone training. As was discussed in par 1.2, the front-line staff in the South African hotel industry are lacking skills and experiences, which is caused by means of irregular staff training. It is a recognised fact that a hotel manager's day is very full, very long and extensive in nature. The fact that training is continuously necessary in the light of frequent changes and increasing demands made by customers cannot be ignored.

#### 9.7.5 The Participants That Have an Effective Training Program

In Figure 9.10 the managers indicate the participating hotels with and without an effective training program.

**Figure 9.10 The participants that have an effective training program (managerial point of view) (1996)**

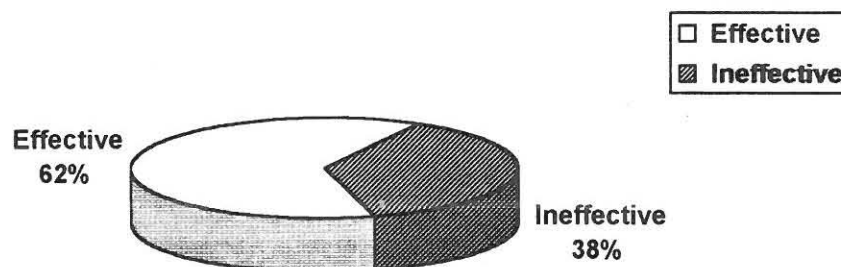


Figure 9.10 reflects that 62% of the participating hotels indicated that the training program was effective and the rest of the hotels indicated ineffective training. Those respondents who indicated **No** in Annexure B, Question 29, were considered to be the hotels with ineffective training.

As was discussed earlier in par 7.3.7, it appears that training is effective to the extent that staff come closer to the perfection of training result than before the training was undertaken. It is necessary to discuss the extent of improvement that will result from an effective training program.

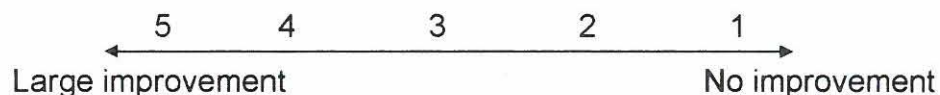
### 9.7.6 Improvement Caused by Effective Training

Table 9.29 gives an indication of the improvement caused by effective training as seen by the managers in the participating hotels.

**Table 9.29 Improvement caused by effective training (managerial point of view) (1996)\***

Extent of improvement	Result	Ranking
Staff performance	4,1	1
Productivity	3,6	2
Communication skills	3,3	3
Customer service	2,2	4
Profitability	2,2	4
Average	3,1	-

\* Basis: Five-point rating scale



The relatively high degree of improvement that was achieved can be as a result of effective training. From table 9.29, one can see that the largest improvement is reflected in staff performance. Profitability and customer service, ranked at the lowest rate, are not surprising when one considers par 1.1 which indicates that there are major problems in the hotel industry. Comparing with table 9.32, it is quite clear that focusing on customers is the most important element in improving service quality, but table 9.29 reflected that customer service is not important in staff training.



### 9.7.7 Reasons for Unsuccessful Training

The reasons for unsuccessful training are outlined in Table 9.30 by the managers of the participating hotels.

**Table 9.30 Reasons for unsuccessful training (managerial point of view) (1996)**

Reason for unsuccessful training	No	% *	Ranking
Staff rotation	1	9,1	1
Most training too complex	1	9,1	1
No improvement	1	9,1	1
Preferring short way	1	9,1	1

\* The same percentages in this column are shown as the number indicated **No** in Annexure B, Question 32 (N=11).

Only four of the eleven respondents gave reasons for unsuccessful training as indicated by staff rotation, training too complex, no improvement and preferring the short way.

### 9.7.8 The Reasons for Having no Training Plan

The managers' reasons for having no training plan are given in Table 9.31.

**Table 9.31 The reasons for having no training plan (managerial point of view) (1996)**

Reason for no training plan	N	% *	Ranking
Self-study / experience	8	61,5	1
Being trained more than 3 years ago	7	53,8	2
Training is too costly	5	38,5	3
There is no further training plan	3	23,1	4
Total	23**	-	-



\* The percentages in this column are expressed as a number indicated **No** in Annexure B, Question 29 (N=13).

\*\* This total number is larger than the number of respondents indicating **No** in Annexure B, Question 29 (N=13), as respondents could have selected more than one reason.

The most frequent reason offered by participants for not having a training plan is the short-sighted opinion that staff can be trained through experience. Another reason offered by many respondents for not having a training plan, is that of being trained more than three years ago. One must realise the fact that training is continuously necessary in the light of frequent changes and increasing demands made by customers. This cannot be ignored.

## **9.8 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY**

A service process is seen as a series of links in a quality chain with each staff member acting as a supplier to the next staff member until the service is finally delivered to the customer. An individual staff member in the hotel needs to be involved in the improvement of service quality. Table 9.32 list five key elements of continuous improvement of service quality, and Table 9.33 concludes with five important approaches to improve service quality.

### **9.8.1 The Key Elements of Continuous Improvement of Service Quality**

The key elements of continuous improvement of service quality, as seen by the managers, are given in Table 9.32.

**Table 9.32 The key elements of continuous improvement of service quality (managerial point of view) (1996) \***

Key element	Result	Ranking
Focusing on customers	4,5	1
Top management commitment	3,3	2
Staff involvement	3,2	3
Empowerment	2,1	4
Rewards and recognition	2,0	5
Average	3,0	-

\* Basis: Five-point rating scale

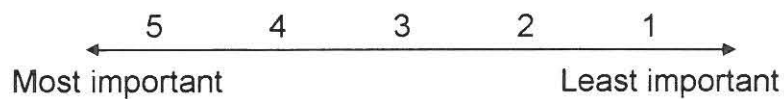


Table 9.32 shows that focusing on customers is the most important element in improving service quality. As discussed in par 8.2.1, recognising customers is the first step towards continuous improvement. All staff members in the front-line departments need to know how their service affects the satisfaction of customers. It is quite clear that continuous improvement of service quality must focus on customers.

### **9.8.2 The Important Approaches of Improving Service Quality in Participating Hotels**

Table 9.33 and 9.34 indicate the important approaches of improving service quality in participating hotels. Table 9.33 indicates the managers' view and Table 9.34 the front-line staff's view.

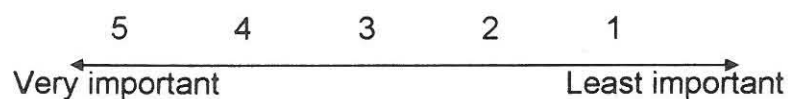
**Table 9.33 The important approaches of improving service quality in participating hotels as viewed by managers (1996) \***

Approach of the improvement	Result	Ranking
Reducing errors, defects and waste in the process of service	4,5	1
Enhancing value to customers through new and improved services	4,3	2
Improving productivity and effectiveness in the use of all resources	4,2	3
Improving responsiveness and cycle time performance	4,0	4
Improving the hotel's performance and leadership position in fulfilling its responsibilities	3,9	5

**Table 9.34 The important approaches of improving service quality in participating front-line staff as viewed by staff (1996)\***

Approach of the improvement	Result	Ranking
Improving productivity and effectiveness in the use of all resources	4,8	1
Improving the hotel's performance and leadership position in fulfilling its responsibilities	4,7	2
Enhancing value to customers through new and improved services	4,5	3
Improving responsiveness and cycle time performance	4,4	4
Reducing errors, defects and waste in the process of service	4,3	5

\* Basis: Five-point rating scale.



From table 9.33 and 9.34, one can conclude that the extent to which the approach of the improvement was implemented is an important consideration. The highest ranking, reflected in table 9.33, is an approach of **reducing errors, defects and waste in the process of service**, while this approach reflected in



table 9.34 is the lowest ranking. The front-line staff show that **improving productivity and effectiveness in the use of all resources** is a very important approach to the improvement of service quality. Therefore, the highest ranking given in table 9.34 is an important consideration. Although **reducing errors, defects and waste** is serious, **improving productivity and effectiveness** is a worthy and fundamental job.

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION**

#### **10.1 INTRODUCTION**

The results, as set out in chapter 9, enabled the researcher to make certain conclusions and recommendations.

In the first section of this chapter, conclusions regarding the study will be drawn. The second section of the chapter will entail the proposal of a number of recommendations regarding the acceptance and implementation of service quality improvement in the South African hotel industry.

#### **10.2 CONCLUSIONS**

The data obtained from the respondents with regard to their background information and biographical characteristics reflects the following broad tendencies:

- 10.2.1 According to a SATOUR survey (Caras, 1993:59), 80% of international tourists believe that service standards in South Africa are below average. The reason for this is that there are too few skills at the top and too many unskilled people at the bottom. The hotel industry consists of staff with huge differences between qualified and unqualified people (par 1.2 and 4.3.3). Comparing table 9.5 and 9.6, one can see that there are more managers with diploma/degree qualifications (57,7%) than front-line staff (33,3%). What is surprising is that the percentage of managers with only a standard eight qualification is 10,4%, while that of the front-line staff is only 6,7%. The qualifications of both managers and front-line staff are in a state of imbalance.

- 10.2.2 From table 9.7, one can conclude that the front-line staff will account for a high percentage of the total hotel staff as the grading of the hotel increases.
- 10.2.3 Comparing to material service, personal service is obviously important (see Fig.9.4). Par 4.2 indicated that personal service is critical and often overrides material service. Even when a product itself does not meet expectations, excellent personal service can redeem the situation. It has been recognised that personal service is a powerful weapon in the competitive market of the hotel industry.
- 10.2.4 The front-line staff represent the hotel's first contact with customers. Their behaviour may be as important in influencing the perceived quality of a service as the behaviour of formal sales staff. The staff performance and customer perceptions always interact in the hotel front-line positions (see par 4.3.2). Table 9.10 reflected that 89,3% of participating hotels indicated that the reception/information departments have the highest service quality of all the departments.
- 10.2.5 Normal or professional routine performance cannot meet particular challenges in the present hotel industry; only those who have firm skills, abilities and responsibilities can offer excellent services to the customers (see par 4.4).

From the views of the front-line staff members in table 9.9 and 9.12, one can see that the attitude towards customers in table 9.9 is the most important factor in service quality, however, the factor of customer handling skills in table 9.12 is only rated at 53.4%. Through the comparison of these two tables, the actual knowledge of serving customers is far behind the knowledge that front-line staff expected.



- 10.2.6 Staff characteristics viewed by managers and staff themselves are different. Table 9.13 reflected that the factor of desire to tackle difficult situations is ranked first (manager's viewpoint). Contrary to this, in table 9.14 this factor ranks last. The front-line staff members indicated the factor of being accurate is ranked first. The perception therefore seems to be similar to the result obtained from the discussion in table 9.11 and 9.12, which reflected that managers prefer their front-line staff to tackle difficult situations, while front-line staff themselves care for the basic characteristics, such as performance accuracy and service ability. The importance of front-line staff's skills / abilities is discussed in par 4.4.1.
- 10.2.7 Aspects influencing staff performance are a vitally important factor in generating standard performance of hotel front-line staff. Tables 9.15, 9.16 and par 4.4.3 reflected that promoting staff to high positions and financial rewards are not only ways to improve service quality. Helping staff to become aware of their goals is the most significant approach to continuous improvement of service quality.
- 10.2.8 Service performance standards stipulate that the service process should measure up to certain specifications, procedures and standards. Table 9.19 revealed that most participating hotels have set up service performance standards, but no schedule to achieve these. Therefore, it makes the standard difficult to obtain. Par 5.4.3 recommended that after service performance standards have been established, the staff will have a permanent set of instruments for describing jobs, defining a fair day's work for each job, training staff to the standards, evaluating performance and rewarding achievements.
- 10.2.9 To maintain customer satisfaction in a hotel, the facilities must be clean, comfortable, sufficiently equipped, safe and secure. The survey as set out in table 9.20 has indicated that cleanliness, value for money

and comfort are key items in assessing customer satisfaction. The service provided by the staff must be friendly, efficient and professional. These are what attract customers to hotels.

Customers perceive both tangible and intangible elements as important to service quality. The intangible elements are frequently more decisive in choosing between alternative service offerings (see par 6.3.1).

- 10.2.10 Service quality assessment is a way of appraising the various types of information and data available; these are the major resources to assess the actual service quality. Service performance evaluation (restaurant) (see Table 6.1), quality control check sheet (see Table 6.2) and a customer comment form (see Table 6.3) are all important components of the assessment and improvement of service quality (par 6.4). Table 9.21 reveals that 62,1% of participating hotels indicated housekeeping/restaurant cleanliness check-list as the main technique to assess the service quality. The fact is that hoteliers are used to emphasising their routine work, such as cleanliness, and do not pay enough attention to the service quality that concerns customers.
- 10.2.11 Customer complaints should be seen as a learning opportunity (see par 6.6). Handling complaints effectively can provide the hotel with the opportunity to retain customers who might come again. Equally important, complaints provide information about perceived and actual problems, and strengthen the links between the hotel and customers. By analysing complaints, managers can deal with the causes of problems. This may mean making design changes, improving quality, or facilitating better communication by eliminating bad service operations.

- 10.2.12 Front-line staff training in service quality can be the key to maintaining an optimal level of performance and can provide major benefits in improving service quality through increasing knowledge, skills and attitude. From the survey (Table 9.23), the majority of the participants (96,6%) indicated that customer dissatisfaction is the main indicator of the need for training. It is important to analyse the different situations when the phenomenon occurs to develop training programs.

It has become accepted in staff training that learning by doing or by getting personally involved is the most successful route to acquiring knowledge and skills, or to changing attitudes. Table 9.25 and 9.26 in the empirical study and par 7.4.1 in theoretical part of study revealed that on-the-job training is the most frequent method used in staff training.

Another important aspect that can be seen in table 9.26 is that the method of sending employees on courses is ranked second, while the same method in table 9.25 is ranked last. It is clear that front-line staff are of the opinion that they need more formal training courses to improve their knowledge and skills. According to the managers, on-the-job training is a better method.

- 10.2.13 The hotel staff in the Free State and Northern Cape are lacking skills and experience and this is caused by irregular staff training. According to table 9.27 and 9.28, a high percentage of staff members had undergone no training. If the manager pays more attention to staff training, service quality will undoubtedly be improved.
- 10.2.14 Effective training is the biggest single contributor to the improvement of staff performance. Profitability and customer service ranked fourth in table 9.29, which is not surprising when one considers par 1.1, which



indicated that there are major problems in the South African hotel industry.

- 10.2.15 The fact is that training is continuously necessary in the light of frequent changes and increasing demands made by customers. It cannot be ignored. By identifying the key performance characteristics needed for success, the hotel can plan its training program and help staff to make the best possible contribution to customer needs (see par 7.2.1). The reasons for having no training plan, reflected in Table 9.31, are short-sighted opinions. The experience of the staff must be obtained through well-planned training.
- 10.2.16 The service offered by the hotel staff will never satisfy all customers. Innovation is always required in all operations and all service unit activities of the front-line positions. The front-line staff indicated in Table 9.34 that improving productivity and effectiveness in the use of all resources is a very important approach to the improvement of service quality. Par 8.3 reflected that the long-term effective approach of continuous improvement efforts would create a renewed sense of competitive energy in the hotel industry.
- 10.2.17 Finally, a certain number of hoteliers do not care about service quality. It would appear that because some small hotel managers are so involved in planning, organising, controlling and activating they do not have the time to take care of the improvement of service quality. This is perhaps understandable if one considers that for most of the small hotels there may be no immediate competition in their geographical area.

### 10.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.3.1 As competition becomes tougher, service quality becomes an increasingly important issue in the South African hotel industry. It is necessary for hotel managers to become aware of and accept the significant need for service quality improvement in order to meet customer needs.
- 10.3.2 Material service and personal service are two factors in servicing customers. The first relates to tangible aspects and the second involves a human interface between customers and front-line staff members. It is most important to note that personal service is critical and often overrides material service. It is a powerful weapon in the competitive hotel market.
- 10.3.3 Both managers and staff members should take cognisance of the fact that there is a need for the improvement of technical knowledge, skills and attitude. Hotel managers, especially those managers in small hotels, need to realise that they must update themselves regularly with the latest developments in the hotel business.
- 10.3.4 To ensure that the service quality performed by front-line staff improves, it is important to note that a well-designed plan is necessary. Furthermore, the implementation of the plan is vital throughout the front-line departments in a hotel.
- 10.3.5 Service quality is a way to appraise various types of information and data that make up the major resources to assess the actual service. It must be ensured that both managers and staff in the hotel should see the services that are important to the customers. The measurement and control of service quality must be monitored on a regular basis after the plan has been implemented.

- 10.3.6 Staff training in front-line departments can be the key to maintaining an optimal level of performance in the hotel, because it can provide major benefits in improving service quality through increasing knowledge, skills and attitudes. Top management must realise that one of their objectives should be to provide training opportunities for staff to optimise their performance in pursuit of the hotel's goals.

Training is effective to the extent that staff come closer to the perfection of training results than before the training was undertaken. It is necessary to discuss the extent of improvement that will result from an effective training program.

- 10.3.7 Hotel managers should take cognisance of the fact that hotel success is contingent upon the superiority of the service quality sold -- superiority compared to competing services. Such superiority can be achieved and maintained only by continuous, never-ending quality improvements.
- 10.3.8 The improvement of the service quality of front-line staff must become priority in all of the hotel industry, irrespective of the size of the hotel. The time has come for front-line staff members and hotel managers to accept that service quality management will have to become a fully-fledged management function on a par with other functions such as marketing, financing and production.



## **10.4 POSSIBLE AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

- 10.4.1 The total service quality situation in the other South African hospitality industries should be researched in order to meet the needs of both domestic and international customers.
- 10.4.2 The development of the hotel industry should be advanced by the improvement of service quality.
- 10.4.3 A comparison of service quality between the international hotel industry and the South African hotel industry.
- 10.4.4 An investigation into the training methods used in the hotel industry and how they can be adapted to the needs of the staff in specific hotels.

## **10.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Service quality is one of the key issues for survival in the hotel industry, and is a major factor for achieving commercial success. Faced with rapidly increasing competition, the South African hotel industry simply has no choice but to improve service quality through a well-designed staff training program. There is a great growth potential for the hotel market if service quality can meet the needs of customers.

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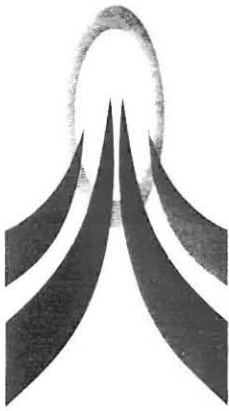
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Central University of  
Technology, Free State

# Technikon

*Vrystaat • Free State • Foreistata*

ANNEXURE A

1996-07-16

Dear Sir/Madam

## SURVEY REGARDING THE SERVICE QUALITY OF FRONT-LINE STAFF IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN HOTEL INDUSTRY

Mr Jason Pan, a student for the Masters Diploma in Technology: Business Practice at this Technikon, is currently doing a study into the quality of service in the South African Hotel Industry. The purpose of the study is to make a contribution to improved quality of service in the industry.

The survey is limited to hotels in the Free State and Northern Cape and your hotel has been selected for inclusion in the survey. In view of the fact that only a limited number of hotels have been selected to participate, your cooperation is of VITAL IMPORTANCE for the success of the study.

It would be appreciated if you would be so kind as to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return same in the postage paid envelope, provided herewith, within fourteen days of receipt. All information provided by yourself will be treated as STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL and you will be furnished with a free copy of the report on completion of the study.

Should you experience any problems in completing the questionnaire you are requested to contact Mr Jason Pan at the following telephone numbers:

Office hours: (051) 4484007  
After hours: (051) 4474526

Thanking you in anticipation for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely.

MR AP ROUX  
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## ANNEXURE B

### QUESTIONNAIRE (STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL)

Name of hotel \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postal address \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person completing questionnaire \_\_\_\_\_

COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRES BY PLACING A CROSS (X) IN THE APPROPRIATE BLOCK(S).

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What is the present grading of your hotel?

1	One star	
2	Two star	
3	Three star	
4	Four star	
5	Five star	

2. What form of ownership applies to your hotel?

1	Sole proprietorship	
2	Partnership	
3	Close corporation	
4	Private co.	
5	Public co.	
6	Other	

3. Does your hotel belong to a large hotel chain?

1	Yes	
2	No	

If yes, go to question 4. If no, please specify in question 5.

4. If yes at question 3, which one of the following does it belong to?

1	Southern sun	
2	Peotea	
3	Karos	
4	City Lodge	
5	Other	

5. If other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

6. Formal qualification of owner/manager

1	None	
2	Std. 8	
3	Std. 10	
4	Diploma	
5	Degree	
6	Other	

7. If other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

8. How many employees, including managers, are employed in your hotel?

1	0 -- 10	
2	11 -- 20	
3	21 -- 40	
4	41 -- 60	
5	61 -- 80	
6	81 -- 100	
7	More than 100	

9. How many front-line staff members are employed in your hotel (including front-office, door man, housekeeping, food and beverage departments)?

01 -- 10	
11 -- 20	
21 -- 40	
41 -- 60	
61 -- 80	
81 -- 100	
Over 100	

### **SERVICE QUALITY PERFORMANCE OF FRONT LINE STAFF**

10. In the South African hotel industry, which of the following services in your view are most important at present?

1	Material service -- relating to tangible aspects, such as product quality, service environment and delivery system	
2	Personal service -- involving a human interface between customer and front-line staff, it encompasses skill and ability, service attitude, accuracy and ultimately personal system	



11. How important, in your view, are the following service quality factors at your hotel? Please rank order the list below. (1= most important, 2 = second most important, etc. 8= least important.)

1	The attitude towards customer	
2	Reliability (dependability)	
3	Staff knowledge & skills	
4	Security & safety	
5	Tangible facilities	
6	Communication	
7	Understanding the customer	
8	Hotel credibility	

12. If other, please specify and include in your ranking. \_\_\_\_\_

13. What is your experience concerning the quality of service that the following front-line departments in your hotel offer?

very low   low   average   high   very high

1	Reception / information	1	2	3	4	5
2	Reservation	1	2	3	4	5
3	Cashier	1	2	3	4	5
4	Door man	1	2	3	4	5
5	Food production	1	2	3	4	5
6	Dining room	1	2	3	4	5
7	Banquet / function room	1	2	3	4	5
8	Other, specify	1	2	3	4	5

14. Please indicate for each of the pair of terms listed below, the extent to which, in your experience, it characterises the behaviour of front-line staff towards customers at your hotel.

1. Pleasant	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Unpleasant
2. Unfriendly	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Friendly
3. Disinterested	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Interested
4. Relaxed	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Tense
5. Cold	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Warm
6. Flexible	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Inflexible
7. Gloomy	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Cheerful
8. Considerate	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Inconsiderate
9. Nasty	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Nice
10. Agreeable	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Disagreeable
11. Insincere	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Sincere
12. Supportive	1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5	Hostile

15. Please indicate to what extent front-line staff at your hotel currently possess the knowledge and skills listed below. (1= not at all; 2 = to some extent; 3 = average extent; 4 = considerable extent; 5 = great extent)

1	Technical knowledge (method and procedure)	1	2	3	4	5
2	Tangible product knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
3	Knowledge about hotel business	1	2	3	4	5
4	Knowledge of operational support personnel	1	2	3	4	5
5	Customer handling skills, (such as, service selling, problem solving, handling conflict.)	1	2	3	4	5
6	Dealing with complaints	1	2	3	4	5
7	Understanding the capability of the hotel	1	2	3	4	5
8	Experience of operational practices	1	2	3	4	5
9	Other, please specify	1	2	3	4	5

16. Please rank order the following in terms of how characteristic it is of staff at your hotel. (1=most characteristic; 2= second most characteristic, etc. 10= least characteristic)

1	Ability to learn	
2	Be accurate	
3	Be alert	
4	Ability to follow instructions	
5	Desire to learn	
6	Desire to tackle difficult situations	
7	Acceptance of challenges	
8	Ability to adjust to new situations, new conditions, new problems and assignments	
9	Coolness under pressure	
10	The ability to handle stress	

17. According to your view, which of the following aspects have the greatest influence on the performance of the front-line staff? (1=most influence; 2= second most influence, etc.)

1	Using money as a reward	
2	Letting every staff member know where he/she fit into the hotel	
3	Helping staff to become aware of their own goals	
4	Keeping staff informed on how well they have performed	
5	Letting staff participate in decision-making	
6	Being a member of a cohesive team	
7	Training and developing the staff	
8	Promoting to a higher position	
9	Management personal care towards staff members	
10	Other	

18. If other, please specify and include in your ranking \_\_\_\_\_

## SERVICE QUALITY PLANNING

19 Do you have a service quality plan for your hotel?

Yes	
No	

If yes, please go to question 20, if no, please go to question 21.

20. Having answered yes in question 19, please indicate which of the following processes you use in your hotel?

1	Analysing the service situation	
2	Collecting data, such as, market dynamics, sales analysis, customers, staff, production and competition	
3	Developing objectives	
4	Implementing the plan	
5	Other, specify:	

21. Having answered no in question 19, please indicate the most important reasons for not having a service quality plan:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

22. How important are the following aspects in the requirement of service performance standards? (1= not important, 5= very important)

1	The statement must be specific, clear, complete and accurate	1	2	3	4	5
2	The standard of performance must be measurable or observable	1	2	3	4	5
3	The standard must be attainable	1	2	3	4	5
4	The standard must conform to hotel policies, goals and applicable legal constraints	1	2	3	4	5
5	Certain kinds of standards must have a time limit set for achievement	1	2	3	4	5
6	Other, please specify	1	2	3	4	5



## SERVICE QUALITY MEASUREMENT AND CONTROL

23. Please indicate which of the following items are utilised in assessing customer satisfaction with services at your hotel?

1	Availability		10	Efficient	
2	Smooth		11	Polite	
3	Fast response		12	Value for money	
4	Convenience		13	Quite	
5	Comfortable		14	Clean	
6	Pleasant		15	Safety	
7	Relaxing		16	Private	
8	Provision of reasonable facilities		17	Other, specify:	
9	Spacious		18		

24. Do you have an assessment system for service quality in your hotel?

Yes	
No	

If yes, please complete No.25.

25. Indicates which of the following techniques are used in your hotel to assess the service quality?

1	Service performance evaluation	
2	Quality control check sheet	
3	Housekeeping / restaurant cleanness check-list	
4	Customer comment form	
5	Other, specify:	

26. On an average, how many complaints do you receive per month? Please mark the appropriate category..

1	0 – 5	
2	6 – 10	
3	11 – 20	
4	21 – 50	
5	51 – 100	
6	101 or more	

27. Do you think that inviting complaints provides a good learning opportunity for the front-line staff?

YES	
NO	

### STAFF TRAINING IN SERVICE QUALITY

28. Which of the following situations will give an indication that you must give attention to the training of the front-line staff?.

1	Customer dissatisfaction	
2	Disorganisation and confusion	
3	Low morale	
4	Low sales	
5	Low efficiency	
6	Sanitation problems	
7	Other, specify:	
8		

29. Do you have a training plan?

YES	
NO	

If yes, go to question 30. If no, go to question 35.

30. If yes in question 29, please briefly list the training methods you use in your hotel:  
(e.g. lecture method, etc.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 5. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_ 6. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 7. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_ 8. \_\_\_\_\_

31. Approximately what percentage of your front-line staff have undergone training during the past two years? \_\_\_\_\_ %

32. Was your training effective?

YES	
NO	

If yes, please go to question 33, if no, go to question 34.

33. If the training was effective, to what extent did the following improve? Please rank order the list below.

1	Profitability	
2	Productivity	
3	Staff performance	
4	Customer service	
5	Communication skills	
6	Other, specify:	

34. If the training was unsuccessful, what were the reasons for it? Please list.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ 5. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 6. \_\_\_\_\_

35. If answered no in question 29, please specify the following reasons:

1	Staff have been trained more than 3 years ago	
2	There is no further training plan	
3	The training is too costly	
4	No time to organise training	
5	Self-study / experience	
6	Other, specify:	

### **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY**

36. What do you think of the following key elements of continuous improvement of service quality? Please rank order it. (1= the most important; 6= the least important)

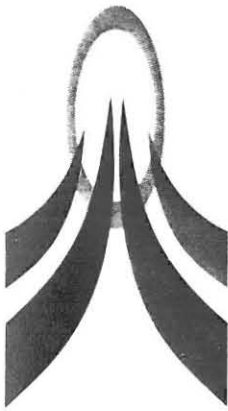
1	Focusing on the customer	
2	Top management commitment	
3	Empowerment	
4	Staff involvement	
5	Rewards and recognition	
6	Other, specify:	

37. From your viewpoint please give an indication of the importance of the following approaches to improve service quality in your hotel. (1 = not important, 5 = very important)

1	Enhancing value to customers through new and improved services	1	2	3	4	5
2	Reducing errors, defects and waste in the process of service	1	2	3	4	5
3	Improving responsiveness and cycle time performance	1	2	3	4	5
4	Improving productivity and effectiveness in the use of all resources	1	2	3	4	5
5	Improving the hotel's performance and leadership position in fulfilling its responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5
6	Other, specify:	1	2	3	4	5

**THANK YOU KINDLY FOR YOUR COOPERATION AND PATIENCE**





Central University of  
Technology, Free State

# Tecnnikon

*Vrystaat • Free State • Foreistata*

ANNEXURE C

1996-11-18

Dear Sir/Madam

## SURVEY REGARDING THE SERVICE QUALITY OF FRONT-LINE STAFF IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN HOTEL INDUSTRY

Please receive our sincere appreciation for your kind co-operation in completing the questionnaire regarding the above-mentioned matter. The information we received from you is of invaluable worth for Mr Jason Pan's study. He is at present doing his Masters Diploma in Technology: Business Practice.

We are, however, of the opinion that we must also gather certain information from the front-line staff. The opinion of the front-line staff will enhance the quality of the study and enable us to draw a comparison between the views of the management and staff.

We will really appreciate it if you could distribute the enclosed questionnaire they are requested to contact Mr Jason Pan at the following telephone numbers:

Office hours: (051) 4484007  
After hours: (051) 4474526

Thanking you in anticipation for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely.

MR AP ROUX  
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## ANNEXURE D

### QUESTIONNAIRE TO FRONT-LINE STAFF

#### STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Name of hotel \_\_\_\_\_

Department in which you are working \_\_\_\_\_

Name and Tel. number \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRES BY PLACING A CROSSING (X) IN THE APPROPRIATE BLOCK(S):

1. What is the present grading of your hotel?

1	One star	
2	Two star	
3	Three star	
4	Four star	

2. What type of job or task do you perform in your hotel?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your formal education level?

1	None	
2	Std. 8	
3	Std. 10	
4	Diploma	
5	Degree	
6	Other	

4. Do you have any formal training for the hotel industry, for example a Diploma in Hotel Management or training at a Hotel School?

Yes	
No	

5. If Yes in question 4, please describe the type of training that you have undergone.

---



---

6. How important, in your view, are the following service quality factors at your hotel? Please rank order the list below: (1= the most important, 2= the second most important, 8= the least important)

1	The attitude towards customers	
2	Reliability (dependability)	
3	Staff knowledge & skills	
4	Security & safety	
5	Tangible facilities	
6	Communication	
7	Understanding the customer	
8	Hotel credibility	

7. Please indicate for each of the pair of terms listed below, the extent to which, in your experience, it characterises the behaviour of front-line staff towards customers in your hotel.

- |                 |                   |               |
|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| (1) Pleasant    | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Unpleasant    |
| (2) Friendly    | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Unfriendly    |
| (3) Interested  | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Disinterested |
| (4) Relaxed     | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Tense         |
| (5) Warm        | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Cold          |
| (6) Flexible    | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Inflexible    |
| (7) Cheerful    | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Gloomy        |
| (8) Considerate | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Inconsiderate |
| (9) Nice        | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Nasty         |
| (10) Agreeable  | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Disagreeable  |
| (11) Sincere    | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Insincere     |
| (12) Supportive | 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 | Hostile       |



8. What do you think of the front-line staff at your hotel currently possess the knowledge and skills listed below, please rank order it: (1= the most important, 8= the least important)

1	Technical knowledge (method and procedure)	
2	Tangible product knowledge	
3	Knowledge about hotel business	
4	Knowledge of operational support personnel	
5	Customer handling skills (service selling, problem solving)	
6	Dealing with complaints	
7	Understanding the capability of the hotel	
8	Experience of operational practices	

9. Please rank order the following in terms of how characteristic it is of the staff at your hotel? (1= the most characteristic, 10= the least characteristic)

1	Ability to learn	
2	Be accurate	
3	Be alert	
4	Ability to follow instructions	
5	Desire to learn	
6	Desire to tackle difficult situations	
7	Acceptance of challenges	
8	Ability to adjust to new situations, new problems and assignments	
9	Coolness under pressure	
10	The ability to handle stress	

10. According to your view, which of the following aspects have the greatest influence on the performance of the front-line staff? Please rank order it. (1= the most influence, 2= the second most influence)

1	Using money as a reward	
2	Letting staff member know where he/she fits into the hotel	
3	Helping staff to become aware of their own goals	
4	Keeping staff informed on how well they have performed	
5	Letting staff participate in decision-making	
6	Being a member of a cohesive team	
7	Training and developing the staff	
8	Promoting to a higher position	
9	Management personal care towards staff members	

11. Please indicate which of the following techniques are used in your hotel to assess the service quality? You may indicate more than one technique.

1	Service performance evaluation	
2	Quality control check sheet	
3	Housekeeping/restaurant cleanness check-list	
4	Customer comment form	
5	Other, specify:	

12. If your hotel has a training plan, what is the most frequent methods you use in your hotel?

Please indicate all the methods and rank it. (1= most important, 9= least important)

1	On the job training	
2	Demonstration	
3	Lecture	
4	Conference	
5	Videos	
6	Panel discussions	
7	Practical runs	
8	Sending on courses	
9	Cross training	
10	Other:	

13. Approximately what percentages of your front-line staff have undergone training during 1995-1996?

Percentage of the staff that have undergone training	Result
0-10	
11-20	
21-30	
31-40	
41-50	
51-60	
61-70	
71-80	
81-90	
91-100	

14. From your viewpoint, please give an indication of the importance of the following approaches to improve service quality in your hotel. (1= Not important, 5= Very important)

1	Enhancing value to customers through new and improved services	1	2	3	4	5
2	Reducing errors, defects and waste in the process of service	1	2	3	4	5
3	Improving responsiveness and cycle time performance	1	2	3	4	5
4	Improving productivity and effectiveness in the use of all resources	1	2	3	4	5
5	Improving the hotel's performance and leadership position in fulfilling its responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5
6	Other, specify:	1	2	3	4	5

**THANK YOU KINDLY FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION AND PATIENCE**